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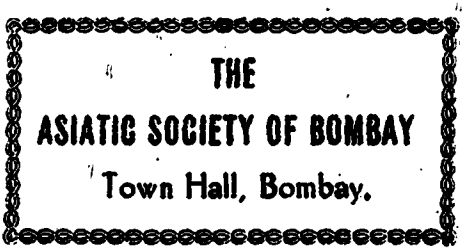

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ALFRED E. T. WATSON

RED DEER

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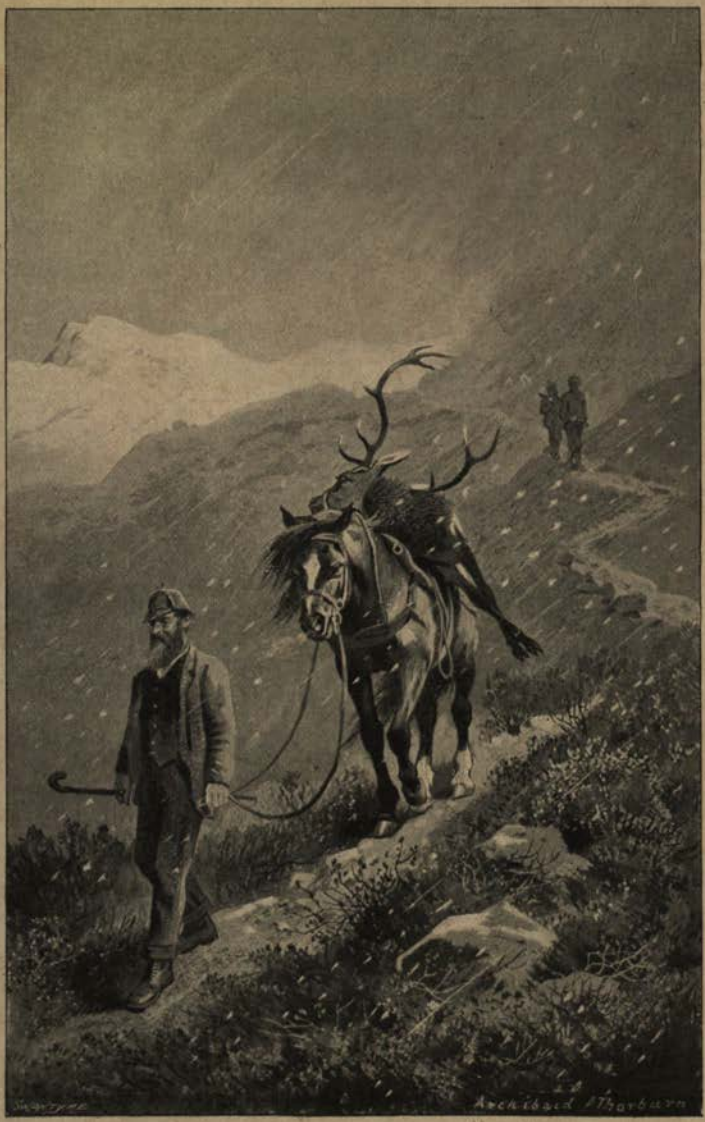

THE LAST STAG OF THE SEASON

RED DEER

NATURAL HISTORY
BY THE REV. H. A. MACPHERSON

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BY CAMERON OF LOCHIEL

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PREFACE

THE design of the *Fur and Feather Series* is to present monographs, as complete as they can possibly be made, on the various English birds and beasts which are generally included under the head of Game.

Books on Natural History cover such a vast number of subjects that their writers necessarily find it impossible to deal with each in a really comprehensive manner; and it is not within the scope of such works exhaustively to discuss the animals described, in the light of objects of sport. Books on sport, again, seldom treat at length of the Natural History of the furred and feathered creatures which are shot or otherwise taken; and, so far as the Editor is aware, in no book hitherto published on Natural History or Sport has information been given as to the best methods of turning the contents of the bag to account.

Each volume of the present Series will, therefore, be devoted to a bird or beast, and will be divided into three parts. The Natural History of the variety will first be given; it will then be considered from the point of view of sport; and the writer of the third division will assume that the creature has been carried to the larder, and will proceed to discuss it gastronomically. The origin of the animals will be traced, their birth and breeding described, every known method of circumventing and killing them—not omitting the methods employed by the poacher—will be explained with special regard to modern developments, and they will only be left when on the table in the most appetising forms which the delicate science of cookery has discovered.

It is intended to make the illustrations a prominent feature in the Series. The pictures in the present volume are after drawings by Mr. John Charlton and Mr. Archibald Thorburn.

ALFRED E. T. WATSON.

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By the Rev H. A. Macpherson

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NATURAL HISTORY OF THE RED DEER

BY THE

REV. H. A. MACPHERSON, M.A.

CHAPTER I

THE RED DEER'S HOME

THE history of the wild red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) is closely interwoven with our national life ; nor can we doubt that in former days the exercise of hunting served to develop the best qualities of physical excellence in much the same way in which athletic sports at present influence the rising generation of Englishmen. Many Acts of Parliament were passed in both England and Scotland, intended to restrict the pleasures of the chase, and to reserve them for the most powerful. But the red deer inhabited our islands long before the historic period. Its range then as now included most of temperate Europe ; but the stags which 'belled' over our moors and mosses in those distant days carried much finer antlers than their modern descendants. The sands of Morecambe Bay have a reputation at the present time for the large symmetrical horns which are from time to time washed

out by the tide from the holes in which they have lain embedded for ages.

The peat bogs of Scotland, especially of the Western Highlands, tell the same story. Even the gravel beds of our inland valleys often yield fragments of red deer antlers, sometimes at a great depth below the present surface. These remains are seldom quite perfect. Those found in the rubbish heaps of Roman settlements usually bear evidence of having been sawn asunder by workmen, whose task it was to manufacture spear-handles and other utensils from stag-horn. But the fine development of most of the remains shows that our modern stags fall far short of the standard of heads carried by the stags which cropped our hill-sides when the aurochs fought with rival bulls on the fells of Westmorland, and wolves found a safe retreat among the limestone caves of Furness. Originally, the red deer roamed at will from the north to the south of Britain. The weald of Kent was no less the haunt of well-furnished hinds than the waste lands of Lancashire, or the more distant solitudes of central Scotland. But the interests of the great barons induced them to obtain authority from the Crown to enclose their favourite chase in many instances ; with the result that a large number of the best coverts for deer became secluded as private property. This re-

mark applies to England almost entirely. I have no special information as to Ireland. The subject of Irish red deer has been dealt with by several writers of Irish nationality, including Archdeacon Rowan, whose 'Lake Lore' contains a chapter on the red deer of the Killarney Mountains. Mr. R. J. Ussher contributed to the 'Zoologist' a paper entitled 'Notes on Irish Red Deer,' from which some useful information may be gleaned ('Zool.,' 1882, pp. 81–84). Thompson's 'Natural History of Ireland' should also be consulted. Our English red deer have received ample justice at the hands of Dr. Collyns and Richard Jefferies, but only as regards that stronghold of the race which exists among the Devonian woodlands. St. John and other Scottish sportsmen have done ample justice to our grand Highland deer; but, curiously enough, no one except the writer himself has attempted to depict the life of the stag upon the face of the mist-wrapped hills of the English Lake district.

This fact may well serve as an excuse for including in the present volume a description of the picturesque region in the midst of which the red deer, which once roamed from the shores of the North Sea to the red sandstone cliffs that break the swell of the Irish Channel, have for many years past found their only northern sanctuary. The forest of Martindale is

situated in the very heart of the Lake district. It is bounded on the north by the long winding reaches of Ulleswater Lake. Haweswater, a lonely loch, abounding in charr and gwyniad, bars a way of escape to the eastward, unless an outlying deer makes for Shap Fell. High Street, across which the Roman sappers engineered a military road, is a favourite haunt of the red deer; but they do not roam over to Windermere or Patterdale under ordinary circumstances. Indeed, the deer are most partial to the centre of Martindale, which includes the valleys of Boarsdale, Bannerdale, Rampsgill, and Fusedale. The nature of the rock causes it to splinter at sharp angles, hence the crags of the district frequently assume an irregular and jagged outline, which adds variety to the scenery. In the present day it is usual to reach Martindale by driving from Pooley Bridge along the Westmorland side of the lake. It is also easy to row across from the Cumberland side in a small boat. But even a century ago the stretch of hills, each divided by a deep gully from its next neighbour, which extended from Shap to Patterdale, must have filled the mind of a casual stranger with a sense of loneliness and isolation, due for the most part to the weird gloom with which the dark precipices that rise above the four dales just mentioned are certainly invested.

I never visit Bannerdale myself without glancing upwards at the deserted eyrie of the sea eagles which once filled a shelf of precipice, lying in a sort of shadow, not far below the summit of Buck Crag. It was between 1793 and 1809 that old Edward Sisson, the wildfowler, shot the female off her nest. He cut off the foot as a token of what he had done. One of the claws was missing, showing that iron traps were already used to destroy our Lakeland eagles. Sisson carved a claw out of a piece of wood, and coloured it to match the real claws. The eyrie from which this bird was shot was the last used in Lakeland. At least so old folks say. They also relate that the eyrie contained two eggs at the time of Sisson's achievement. The screes at the foot of that eyrie are redolent still of the 'foil of the Sweet Mart,' a sadly persecuted animal. How it is that the 'Mart' has not been exterminated long since I hardly know. I suppose that it must be explained by the fact that the marten-cat frequently runs to ground in crags which are too lofty and precipitous to afford a footing to the most adventuresome of fell-side hounds. There were 'Foumarts' too in Martindale, and that within the recollection of men who are even now but middle-aged. But if you care to learn for yourself *when* the true wild cat couched beside the stag upon the heather of

Martindale, you must wend your way (not to the Chapelry of Martindale, but) to the mother church of this parish. There arrived, you may trace for yourself the written evidence of the old-fashioned church-wardens, who treated the children to 'scholar's ale' at the expense of the parish, and disbursed many small sums for the heads of raven, badger or brock, as well as for the scalps of genuine wild cats. A great resort of *Felis catus* was this same lonely region of Martindale.

Now, alas! the skirl of the grey cat no longer breaks the stillness of the uplands when the damp out of the wet ground is rising in clouds of white vapour from the bottom of Fusedale. Hushed for ever is the eagle's scream of war and rivalry in Banner-dale, wild as the head of the valley looks, hemmed in as it is with ramparts of dizzy precipice. But if you linger beside the farmhouse at Dalehead, of which more anon, you will probably recognise the long-drawn, mournful wail of the brown buzzard, or else the harsh croak of the vigilant raven will break upon your ear, reminding you that a haunch of waste venison would no more come amiss to his hungry paunch than a gamey specimen of Herdwick mutton. It is in the centre of these remote mountains, re-moved a breathing space from electric bells and

shrieking engines and all other forms of modern Philistinism, that the old English stag finds a free lodging, cropping the pastures of his native wilds without a thought of fences or barriers of any kind For Squire Hasell, the popular representative of one of the best and most sporting families in the North of England, does not surround his forest with artificial bounds. The deer are absolutely unshackled and wander as freely as any Highland deer, feeding where they will and sleeping as they list. The sanctuary of Martindale is the hill known locally as the 'Nab.' It is not marked upon all the maps, but it lies between Rampsgill and Bannerdale. If you look up the valley of Martindale, just after you leave the old church (where they used to hang the heads of ravens on the ancient yew tree), you will see the steep slopes of Rampsgill lying to your left. Bannerdale occupies the right corner of the dale. The rounded hill which stands out against the skyline between Rampsgill and Bannerdale is the 'Nab.' There is plenty of good feeding for deer on the 'Nab.' Of course its sides are seamed with crags; but it includes fine grassy slopes, varied with bracken, which add a rust-red hue to the landscape when the leaves have begun to assume the varied hues which we look for at the fall of the year.

The stags consort with their fellows, and the hinds feed together to a large extent; so that, when crossing the fells, one almost expects to see a full-grown stag accompanied by one or more younger animals of his own sex. Small parties of hinds are often to be seen clustering together in sheltered places or out on the tops of the mountains. The sexes mix together to a certain extent at all seasons, with the exception of course of any particular stag which happens to have found some fat pasture which reconciles him to the loneliness of an anchorite life. Broadly speaking each herd of deer chooses its particular grazing ground according to the season of the year.

The fells near Bampton and Shap are only visited irregularly. The approach of winter impels many of the older deer to cross over from the 'Nab' to Place Fell, because the locality last named affords a supply of sound heather which stands the deer in good stead in severe weather. The murrain which used to ravage more southern forests in Norman days appears to be now unknown in Westmorland. The spring of the year however makes some gaps in the ranks of the deer; for it is when the primrose flowers, and the 'Gowk' sends its challenge echoing through the dales, that the privations of the winter season begin to tell upon the exhausted frames of the weaker

members of the herd. In old days these individuals would no doubt have fallen an easy prey to the packs of wolves which once infested our English forests. Indeed it seems not unlikely that some at least of the stags which perished in the sands of Morecambe Bay were driven out into the open parts of the estuary when pursued by wolves, which were once extremely numerous in Furness. In feudal days our Lakeland deer were hunted alike by clergy and laity. A number of lawsuits originated in hunting disputes, which naturally roused keen feeling on both sides. The law no doubt often adjusted the differences of neighbours in a friendly fashion. Thus, when a decision was given in the King's Court at Westminster between Alan de Muleton and his wife Alicia, plaintiffs, and Lambert de Muleton and his wife Amabilis, concerning the moiety of the manors of Egremunt, Aspatric, Caudebek, and Brathwayt, a clause was inserted expressly stipulating that if a deer should be roused on the lands of Lambert and Amabilis, their huntsmen and hounds should have the right to follow and take the quarry in the land of Alan and Alicia, without hindrance, as well as the converse. The deer in those days were fenced in by hunting 'hays.' The fences were repaired by the smaller tenants in obedience to the request of the

lord of the manor.' The tenants in some places were bound to assemble at the 'Stable-stand,' ready to drive, or shoot, or course deer at the order of their superior. It should be understood that 'haiae' or 'hays' were not in any sense peculiar to the north of England. They crop up in many places. To take a single reference, the Domesday Survey of Gloucestershire: 'In several instances we find mention of "haiae"—these were enclosures in the woods fenced round with strong hedges into which the beasts of the chase were driven, the entrance being then closed by hurdles. The building and repair of the lord's deer-hedge was one of the ordinary incidents of tenants' service; the word being used for all kinds of game.'[1] In this connection it may be worth while to recall a passage which the Rev. J. Wilson has suggested I should print here. It is not devoid of humour, and it shows that the employment of nets in taking deer was understood in this country. 'One Sir Henry Colt, of Neither Hall in Essex, much in favour with K. Henry the eighth for his merry conceits, suddenly took his leave of him *late* at *night*, promising to wait on his Grace *early* the next morning. Hence he hastened to Waltham Abbey, being informed by his

[1] *An Analysis of the Domesday Survey of Gloucestershire.* By Rev. C. Taylor.

setters that the *Monks* thereof would return in the night from Cheshunt Nunnery, where they had secretly quartered themselves. Sir Henry pitcht a Buckstall (wherewith he used to take Deer in the Forest) in the narrowest place of the Marsh where they were to passe over, leaving some of his Confederates to manage the same. The monks coming out of the Nunnery, hearing a great noise made behind them, and suspecting to be discovered, put out the *light* they had with them, whose *feet* without *eyes* could finde the way home in so used a pathe. Making more hast than good speed they ran themselves all into the net. The next morning Sir H. Colt brought and presented them to King Henry, who had often seen sweeter but never fatter venison.'[1] Fuller tells this story when discussing the morals of the monasteries destroyed by Henry VIII., in 1536–9. But to return to the subject of the Martindale deer, there can be no doubt that the pleasure of following the hunted stag was shared by the whole country-side, even in our own day.

I have listened with eager attention to the gossip of old-fashioned folk, who loved to recall the good cheer which 't'auld squire Hasell' used to dispense to the country-side at Dalehead. The merits of

[1] Fuller's *Church History of Britain*, p. 317, edition 1655.

the pasty provided for the occasion were indisputable, nor was there any stint of good liquor to slake the thirst of those who assisted in driving a stag from the hill to the lower ground. The house at Dalehead was a large 'banqueting room, hung round with the heads of stags killed in the chase, on the adjoining hills.' Wordsworth himself tells us that the room in question was 'fitted up in the sportsman's style, with a cupboard for bottles and glasses, with strong chairs and a dining table; and ornamented with the horns of the stags caught at these hunts for a succession of years, the length of the last race each had being recorded under his spreading antlers.'

The name of Martindale seems to be a corruption of Markendale, for the latter word occurs in Saxton's map of 1576. I admit that John Manwood refers to the district as Martendale as early as 1598, but he was probably incorrect. Hutchinson wrote only a century ago, 'Mr. Hazell of Delmain is possessed of the Chace of Markendale, which borders on the lake (Ulleswater), and includes most of the heights which lie on the eastern side. The lands of his manse being of customary tenure are attended with this badge of servility, the tenants are bound to attend their Lord's hunt within this chase once a year, which is called in their court roll a Boon Hunt.

On this occasion they have each their district allotted on the boundaries of the chase, where they are stationed to prevent the stag flying beyond the liberty.'

Clarke tells us, in his 'Survey of the Lakes,' that Martindale was a separate and independent manor until Queen Elizabeth granted it to the Earl of Sussex as parcel of the barony of Barton, reserving to herself and her successors accommodation for her pad when she came to hunt there.

Under this tenure it was bought by Sir Christopher Musgrave, along with the rest of the barony of Barton. The manor consisted of small tenants, whose place has long since been filled up by large farmers. Clarke describes the old state of tenure as a person familiar with the district: 'The forest lands are held on the common forest tenure, the tenants having what grass they can take with the scythe. They likewise covenant not to drive the lord's deer out of it at any time of the year. In summer, however, the deer seldom come there, they being mostly red deer which always frequent the tops of the mountains in that season. Whenever the lord goes to hunt the stag, the bailiff summons all the tenants before sunset the preceding night, to attend to their strones or stations. These stations are at two places, viz.

Bampkin (=Rampsgill) and Bannerdale, where the deer chiefly lye, and where the tenants stand with their dogs, to prevent the deer escaping to the mountains. This service, which they are to render once a year, is called a Boon Day, and for this every tenant has his dinner and a quart of ale. It is also a custom here that the person who first seizes the hunted deer shall have the head for his trouble. It is remarkable that the first buck taken here was seized by a woman ; she, for the sake of his head, laid hold on him as he stood at bay on a dunghill, threw him down, and getting upon his head, held him fast. The late Mr. Hassel frequently called upon the tenants for this service.'

The head of the Hasell family used to give away two or three hinds every year to the poor of Martindale. The custom fell into abeyance at last in consequence of a succession of severe winters which reduced the stock of deer to little more than a hundred head. There are no poor folk now in Martindale. The necessity of finding remunerative employment has compelled the population of the glens to migrate into the larger towns, leaving the stern hillsides to hardy shepherds and their flocks of small but toothsome Herdwick sheep. I have referred, in the 'Fauna of Lakeland,' to several other deer preserves in the

North country. The most famous of these was Inglewood. This forest belonged to the Crown, and included a large portion of the Eden Valley. Westward it stretched away towards the marshes of the Solway, which have often engulfed fine stags in their fatal quicksands. It was on the edge of this forest that the monks of Holme Cultram Abbey felled the timber required for the purposes of their large establishment. The monks were required to guard the safety and convenience of the royal quarry. These animals frequently quitted the glades of the oak woods to ravage the standing crops in the vicinity.

It was as a compensation for the damage caused by roving deer that Edward III. bestowed certain privileges of grazing upon the inhabitants of towns like Penrith, which chanced to be situated in proximity to the forest. The same monarch found it difficult to protect his deer from the incursions of Scottish noblemen who proved apt in extending the royal grants with more freedom than probably pleased the English foresters. The exploit of 'Hartshorn Tree' illustrates the splendid endurance of a Westmorland stag. This animal was found in Whinfell Park where the osprey used to nest, and was coursed by a single hound. The stag took a northerly course, and crossed the Esk and the smaller tributary

of the Saark, making for Red Kirk in Dumfriesshire. The stag turned homewards from that point, and again ran all along the wooded banks of the Eden until it reached the outside of Brougham Castle. The poor animal found strength to clear the park palings, but expired upon alighting within the enclosure. The noble hound which had made all the running alone was too worn out to clear the palings in his stride. He leapt, but fell backwards, and died upon the outside of the palings. This stirring incident occurred in 1333 or 1334, when Edward Baliol was staying in Westmorland as the guest of the Lord Robert Clifford. The antlers of the stag which showed sport so worthy of a Scottish sovereign were nailed up upon the trunk of a fine oak which grew close to the spot where the stag died. There they remained until the year 1648, when one of the antlers was 'broken down by some of the army.' The tree itself, which had so long been known as 'Hartshorn Tree,' succumbed to the ravages of time in the seventeenth century, but the fame of the extraordinary feat of stag and hound has been handed down to successive generations in the simple distich :

> 'Hercules kill'd Hart a-greese,
> And Hart a-greese kill'd Hercules.'

Inglewood Forest long remained a royal chase. As such it received incidental notice in various public documents. Thus it is mentioned among divers woods, lands, and tenements 'where in his Ma^tie hath a right and title which is by some persons of late controverted,' in a Treasury warrant issued from Whitehall on July 21, 1668. Even after the accession of the Prince of Orange, 'The Town and Manor of Penreth and the Forest of Inglewood were held of her Pr'sent Majesty the Queen Dowager as Lord thereof.' William II. soon granted the manor of Inglewood to the Duke of Portland, who sold it to the Duke of Devonshire in 1737. I have failed to ascertain the precise date at which this historical chase ceased to afford a sanctuary to the red deer. My friend Chancellor Ferguson writes that 'Edward Hasell, who owned Dalemain from 1794 to 1825, inherited the family sporting tastes, and with his hounds assisted at two occasions which may be called historical—the capture of the last stag on Whinfell, and the capture of the last stag in Inglewood Forest, when these two famous and ancient chases were disforested. The Dalemain hounds continued to find stags in Martindale, where the Countess of Lonsdale, in the glories of a carriage and four and outriders, would not infrequently be seen

gracing the meet' ('The Cumberland Foxhounds,' pp. 8–9).

The Duke of Wharton used to hunt in Martindale, driving to the meet in a coach and six, preceded by a running footman dressed in white. The stags of Martindale must often have wandered across the western fells to Ennerdale, where another herd long existed. The shepherds used to say that old stags sometimes ejected sheep from the Pillar Stone by forking them over the side. It was on the south side of Ennerdale Lake that the deer used to harbour chiefly, on what is called 'The Side,' a spot which was then thickly wooded. The depredations which the Ennerdale deer wrought in the crops of the farmers at Gillerthwaite at the top of the lake, and also on Mireside Farm on the east side, were so great that it became necessary to set old scythes and pitchforks in the gaps and open places in the fences to keep them out of the crops. The Side Wood joined Coupland (also an ancient forest), and ran up to Wasdale Fell, also called Wastall, which in 1671 was 'a large forest or wast ground replenished with Red Deer.' Scawfell was the home of a few deer in the last century. One of these animals was chased into Wastwater Lake, in which it was drowned. The Martindale deer alone have escaped the fate of extermination meted

MOON-LIGHTERS

out to the red deer of the Wordsworth country. It was from Martindale, too, that Gowbarrow Park was supplied with the ancestors of the existing herd. The Gowbarrow deer, like those of Muncaster, roam at will over a wild moorland, but their range is limited by fencing. Yet they are as truly wild animals as the deer in any Scottish forest which happens to be enclosed. They are not, I think, as free from the taint of tame blood as the deer on the other side of the lake; because tame stags have been introduced to Gowbarrow on several occasions. The Martindale deer have never received any infusion of any foreign strain. This is remarkable, because most of the English forests which existed in the last two centuries did from time to time supply a home to strange deer. Even in our own time, tame park-fed stags were carried to the remote island forest of Rum, with a view of improving the heads of the Hebridean stags. In the same way draughts of continental deer found their way occasionally into the royal forests south of the Tweed. The Duke of Buckingham was invited to furnish a draught of the Whaddon deer for Windsor Forest—this was in 1685. He replied to the agent who approached him in the following words: 'I cannot bring my mind down low enough to think of selling red deer, but if you believe

that his Majesty would take it kindly of me, I will present him with ten brace of the best that I have.' Three years later the Prince of Orange fetched over one hundred and eight red deer for Windsor from Germany. The animals were shipped in a vessel called the 'Dorothy,' and landed at the Ship Brewhouse Wharfe. The expense of shipping the deer in question amounted to 117*l.* 4*s.* 6*d.*

The Martindale deer had no change of blood, so far as I can discover, until thirteen or fourteen years ago, when Mr. Hasell sent his deerkeeper to obtain half a dozen calves from a well-known forest on the Scottish mainland. One stag calf and five hinds were selected. These animals were taken up in August, and sent over to Mr. Hasell's park of Dalemain, near Penrith. There the young deer wintered. In the following June they were conveyed to Martindale and allowed to shift for themselves. But in consideration of these deer having been fed in a park the previous winter, Jackson prevailed upon Mr. Hasell to cart some hay from Dalemain to Martindale to assist the animals in severe weather. The custom thus established has been continued with good results. It must, however, be understood that only a limited number of even the younger animals partake of the temporary assistance thus

extended to them. Mr. R. Lydekker has suggested that the Westmorland deer are not truly wild, because a few of their number receive a little hay in winter. But he is quite mistaken. The deer of Scottish forests often receive similar aid in hard times, but no one calls them tame deer on that account. It was always usual to feed the red deer in the royal forests of England. The cost of supplying hay to large herds, such as that of Windsor Forest, was often very considerable. Thus in 1691, the hay required for the deer at Windsor Forest cost 60*l.*, in addition to 1,750*l.* expended in feeding the deer in Windsor New Park.

Our public records abound in interesting notes about both red and fallow deer. The six head of deer introduced to Martindale did remarkably well. Some of the hinds took the stag when two years and a half old, dropping their calves in the following summer. They soon mingled freely with the English hinds. As for the young stag, he became the owner of a seraglio in due course; indeed he was a master stag when I had the honour of making his acquaintance for the first time. He was not of quite the same colour as the Martindale stags, but turned out a heavy, well-furnished animal, with a nice head. He succumbed to the hardships of

the terrible winter of 1893-4, being found dead in an out of the way spot, not far from Patterdale.

I had almost forgotten to mention that the Martindale stags occasionally swim the breadth of Ulleswater Lake in order to join the hinds in Gowbarrow Park. Stags have also been found to cross from Gowbarrow to the shores of Martindale, but this is an unusual event. Jackson recollects one particular stag which was very determined to remain in Martindale, whither it had escaped from Gowbarrow. But its wandering propensities may be accounted for by the fact that it was a strange animal, which had been taken to Gowbarrow for the sake of new blood. It was eventually captured in the lake, and towed ashore by a boat's crew. This circumstance reminds me of a description of a royal hunt, in which the quarry sought to escape from his enemy by 'soiling,' or in other words by taking to the water. The details given are so graphic that I venture to reproduce them here. 'Aug. 17. Between Ten and Eleven in the Morning, their Majesties, together with his Royal Highness the Duke, and their Royal Highnesses the Princesses, came to New Park by Richmond, from Hampton Court, and diverted themselves with hunting a Stag, which ran from Eleven to One, when he took to the great Pond, and defended

himself for about half an Hour, when being kill'd, and brought out by the Help of a Boat, the Huntsmen sounded the French Horns. The Skin was taken off, and the Carcass given to the Dogs. His Majesty, the Duke, and the Princess Royal hunted on Horseback; her Majesty and the Princess Amelia hunted in a Four-wheel'd Chaise; and the Princess Carolina in a Two-wheel'd Chaise; and the Princesses Mary and Louisa were in a Coach. Several of the Nobility attended, and among them Sir Robert Walpole, clothed in green, as Ranger. When the Diversion was over, their Majesties, the Duke, and the Princesses, refreshed themselves on the Spot with a Cold Collation (as did the nobility at some Distance of Time after), and soon after Two in the afternoon return'd for Hampton Court.'[1]

[1] *The Monthly Chronicle*, 1728, vol. i. p. 180.

CHAPTER II

THE RED DEER'S LIFE

THE habits of most wild quadrupeds are liable to be largely modified by local circumstances. The red deer conforms to the general rule. The immense forests of Germany, some of which abound in deer, are as dissimilar as possible from many of the stony wildernesses in which most of our Scottish stags take their pleasure. There is a weird, uncanny feeling about the pet corries of our Highland deer. You may tramp through the midst of them for miles, without observing any more stirring sign of life than the whirr of a startled grouse or the hasty scamper of a blue hare. Only here and there, but always at pretty long intervals, does a green brae crop up, as though to redeem the landscape from the reproach of absolute sterility. The ground is often too bare to feed hardy black-faced wedders to a profit. Now, one may feel half bewildered in the mazy depths of a forest in Germany; but the deep woods afford us

assurances of animal life in the tracks of roes, of boar, and other wild creatures, not to mention the steady drilling of the pied woodpecker, or the noisy clamour of some party of jays engaged in the congenial task of mobbing an unlucky grey shrike that has strayed into their domain. We must recollect that deer, even in Scotland, live under very various conditions. Some animals pass much of their existence in the midst of sheltered woods. Others spend their entire life under the open sky, with no protection from the burning rays of the August sun but such as they find in the beds of tall bracken, screened from the driving hail and winter rain only by low stone walls or natural barriers of rock. It must, then, be allowed that no one is likely to lay down hard and fast canons as to the traits of deer, without risking unfavourable criticism. Broadly speaking, heavy and long continued falls of snow usually induce deer to leave high, exposed plateaux ; for the lower grounds afford much greater comfort under such unfavourable circumstances. Even full-grown stags have been found to perish in deep snow drifts in the north of Scotland. It is not surprising, therefore, that many deer should endeavour to secure winter quarters on the slopes of mountains, which are less exposed than the tops of the hills which they are so partial to in the

summer. All the same, deer are wonderfully hardy animals, and can often shift for themselves under the most unfavourable circumstances. Our Martindale deer, for instance, do not really seem to suffer from a low temperature if adequate supplies of food are forthcoming. They contrive to scrape the snow away with their fore-feet even when a really heavy fall has taken place. Especially happy are they, if, in such a predicament, they can obtain access to a bed of nettles; for they are partial to the roots of that plant. In this connection it should always be borne in mind that the condition of deer is largely governed by the character of the food supply which they command. One of the chief reasons for the remarkable development of heads on the Continent is to be found in the 'Browse' which forest deer enjoy. Blasius states that in Germany the dietary of the stag varies seasonally. In spring beech mast and acorns are eaten. In winter the bark of trees, lichens and moss, all go to make up the bill of fare. Certain species of fungi are found in the stomachs of deer. Young shoots are rarely neglected.

In the case of a forest like Martindale, where there is no other wood than stunted hazel or wind-twisted thorns and alder, the deer are forced to subsist throughout the year on an admixture of short sweet

DRIVEN OFF THE HILL

grass and strong wiry bents, besides heather where they can get it. When Martindale was cropped with extensive fields of oats, the deer used to break bounds, and often inflicted considerable injury on the ripening grain before it was carried. At the present time the stags roam in winter in search of fields of turnips, repeating their incursions night after night, in spite of careful watching. Jackson tells me that in winter he often spends several successive nights in herding truant stags and driving them back to the hill. He knows the likeliest directions in which to search with success for the wandering animals; but it would more than tax his ability to keep the creatures within bounds were it not that his labours are admirably seconded by a trained sheep dog. This animal was broken to deer when only eight months old, and has proved as staunch as any mortal man could desire. Indeed, he has been known to pick up a stag in the neighbourhood of Shap Fell, and to drive it back to Howtown, keeping it at bay until the keeper had followed the course on foot. Jackson himself is wise in deer-craft, all of a local kind, it is true, but none the less serviceable. He is the third of his strain in the service of the Hasell family; both his father (who died at a great age) and his grand-uncle having adopted the same vocation in life. He began to assist his father

in driving deer when only eleven years old. It is not therefore surprising that he should be an enthusiast on the subject of deerstalking.

The Martindale herd, which forms the subject of his charge, numbers about two hundred and fifty head at the present time. Of these, about sixty or seventy head are stags, the remainder being hinds and their followers. Jackson tells me that the herd was never more numerous in his time than prior to the severe winter of 1893–94. He estimated the number of animals then at about three hundred head; but about fifty succumbed to the hardships of that terrible winter.

Mr. Hasell only shoots six or seven stags every year. Of recent years one or two hinds have been shot in winter, but this is a departure from the usage of former days. The Martindale stags run up to about twenty-two stone weight; but a stag of eighteen or nineteen stone is reckoned a fine animal. The weight of stags is vastly different at the end of the rutting season. A spent animal may not weigh more than ten or eleven stone, though a few months earlier his carcase would have pulled down seventeen or eighteen stone.

The young of the red deer is calved in early summer, under ordinary circumstances. A few forward hinds drop their offspring during the last days

of May, but June is the calving month *par excellence*. A few late hinds delay parturition until the early days of July. It is possible that these hinds failed to conceive when first served, and were served again at the end of the rutting season.

Twin calves are generally considered very unusual, but they are reported to occur nearly every year in Martindale, though only in single instances. They have been known to occur on Dartmoor. It is very pretty to see the solicitude which a hind displays for the safety of her little one. With us in Lakeland the hind drops her young in an open place, in heather, rushes, bracken, or simply on the green sward. She exhibits great reluctance to wander far from her calf when strangers are near. The male calf, or 'Hirschkalb' as the Germans say, follows its dam until the arrival of autumn. If the hind joins the harem of a master stag, her 'Hirschkalb' is generally driven away by the old stag, and thus weaned from its dam. The case of a female calf, or 'Wildkalb,' is different. The stag allows his consorts to be accompanied by hind calves. Consequently these latter often attend and suck their female parent for upwards of twelve months. The advent of the rut, or 'Brunftzeit' as it is called in Germany, is the chief fact in the life of the stag. Jackson assures me that even young

animals feel the desire to reproduce their kind. The acquisition of a harem is therefore a question of strength and determination. A two-year-old stag is capable of begetting stock, but of course would not be tolerated in the neighbourhood of a master stag. Even the full-grown stags are often severely gored by their rivals, the neck and sides being the chief points assailed. It is not unusual for stags to fight so long and obstinately that eventually the weaker animal succumbs to his injuries. The hinds submit to the overtures of the conqueror, and take no part in the affray of their lord and master. At the opening of the rutting time the necks of the stags swell, and their voices become hoarse.

The precise date at which rutting begins cannot be defined in an arbitrary way. Blasius considers that the veteran stags separate their consorts at the end of August. In Martindale, the hinds are accustomed to take the stag from about the 20th of October to the beginning of December. This is perhaps later than the prevailing experience, but it is impossible to generalise safely. Bell says that the red-deer hind goes with young eight months and a few days. Jackson has told me, on different occasions, that seven months is the period of gestation; but he is no doubt mistaken as to this.

The breeding stags at first roar only occasionally, but as time elapses the discordant 'belling' of the lovesick brutes becomes more and more persistent, especially on cold, clear nights. The strength of a stag can be surmised from the peculiar volume of his bellowing. The deeper and more raucous the sound produced, the more powerful is the stag likely to be. When the master stags are spent, they give place to some of their younger rivals. When the rutting duties cease, the winter coat begins to form. The antlers are sometimes shed in February. A Highland stag has been known to drop his horns in December, but such an event is rare. The Martindale deer seldom cast their antlers until the arrival of April, and some immature animals carry them until May. Hinds cast their winter hair from the month of May onwards, but an animal which happens to be in poor condition not rarely carries the old coat until the month of August. On July 9, 1896, I saw four hinds in Bannerdale, which had lost all the light pelage of winter. Another hind was nearly clean of the grey hair, but the sixth still retained the drab hair of winter almost unchanged. Hinds do not breed annually, as a rule, but there is no hard and fast law as to this among our Lakeland deer. Of course, emparked deer may act very differently from their wild brethren; for

the supply of food has a direct influence upon the powers of the reproductive system of the red-deer hind. Deer, by the way, are very fond of nibbling the remains of shed antlers.

An excellent instance of this is mentioned in a letter which Mr. A. Williamson contributed to Harvie Brown and Buckley's 'Fauna of the Outer Hebrides.' Referring to the deer of the Lews, Mr. Williamson reported, 'I noticed one very striking peculiarity, their immense craving for bones and old deer's horns. My predecessor shot an old horse a few days before he left in May, about two miles from the Lodge. When I arrived in August the deer were coming nightly to chew the bones, and all the latter had disappeared before I left in November of the same year. I have often, when lying watching a herd, seen the hinds chewing the horns of a stag lying on the ground, and that this was a common practice was shown by the marks of their teeth upon the horns of almost every stag I killed late in the season.' Mr. Harvie Brown remarks that the greater appetite displayed by the deer of the Long Island for bones and cast horns may be accounted for by the almost total absence of bone-producing elements in the geology of the Hebrides. The fact that hinds are fond of cast antlers is not in any sense peculiar to the Hebrides, though it may

have become more decidedly pronounced there than elsewhere. I fancy that the deer of the Long Island have always suffered from an inadequate supply of natural phosphates. The barren nature of the soil can hardly fail to strike anyone who crosses the interior of any of the Outer Hebrides. To my mind, it is grossly unfair that the rocky isles of Western Scotland, where mineral wealth is absent, and the excessive cost of carriage renders industrial efforts useless, should be forced to contribute to local rates and national taxation in the same proportion as the rich commercial districts of Southern Scotland. No Edinburgh lawyer would like to have to contribute a third of his income to the State before he could claim a penny for his own use; and yet that is the treatment meted out to many of us Highland lairds. The practical result is to set a positive premium on absenteeism, and to prohibit most capitalists from investing in Highland property.

The deer of the Long Island are reported to have finer heads than formerly, having generally more points than mainland deer. Martin tells us, in his 'Description of the Western Islands of Scotland,' that the Lews deer of his day were forced to feed on sea-ware during severe weather. Such an event, however, was probably then as now of rare occurrence.

The fact that the stags of the old Hebridean race have well-shaped, symmetrical heads is the more surprising when we reflect upon the in-and-in breeding which must have been the rule rather than the exception in the olden days. Of course stags often travel long distances when dissatisfied with their feeding ground, or when desirous to mate with fresh hinds. I have known Skye stags to wander many miles from their accustomed haunts in quest of stray hinds, in pursuit of which they sometimes voluntarily swam across arms of the sea, and landed on lonely islets. Among the mainland forests this trait must tend to secure a general supply of vigorous mates for breeding hinds, except so far as modern deer-fences and other enclosures restrict the journeys of rambling stags. When the fence of an enclosed deer-forest becomes shattered by the storms that sweep over the sides of the mountains in winter, the desire of the wild stags to escape for a time from the limited bounds of their usual hill almost invariably results in some of the herd making good their escape, in spite of the watchfulness of gillies, and of any shepherds whose assistance may be temporarily called in. Yet the extreme caution of wild deer does not hinder them from becoming tame and confiding pets, provided that they are reared in confinement from an early age. It is

very charming to see a young Scotch stag canter up to the windows of a lodge, to beg for an offering of oatcake.

Hinds are more docile pets than stags. It is true that even hinds can and will defend themselves on occasion, especially against dogs, by rapid strokes of their forelegs. Stags are apt to become formidable, especially when the rutting season approaches; for the pugnacious instinct developed by their sexual desires often prompts them to attack strangers, even when entirely unprovoked. If a young stag develops a tendency to attack people, he should be sent to the hill, or disposed of in some other way. A tame stag is rather unsafe even on the hill, for he may take it into his head to patrol a particular beat, and threaten to charge any passer-by. Deer are commonly kept on the same ground as black-faced wedders, and the shepherd who tried to cross a pass guarded by a jealous stag would run a considerable risk of being gored. Occasionally the pranks of a tame stag assume a comic aspect. Some years ago, when self-seeking demagogues had stirred up much agitation in the West Highlands, and the crofters expended their eloquence in denouncing proprietors and factors at the public meetings of a league which busybodies in Glasgow thought fit to subsidise on Irish lines, it

happened that a fine young stag belonging to a neighbour of mine paid an unexpected visit to a Land League meeting. When the proceedings of the league terminated for the evening, and the people wished to leave the building in which the League had met, they were dismayed to find the exit barred by a gentleman wearing a pair of horns. The stag had wandered into a district in which he was unknown, and as the outline of his head was only indistinctly seen in the gloom of a winter's night, the conspirators, minded of the unholy work in which they had so recently been engaged, not unnaturally concluded that the Evil One himself had arrived to claim his own. Many readers will recall the professional experience of Dr. Collyns, who was called upon to attend upon a frightened fisherman. This worthy, it will be remembered, happened to cast his net in the river Barle, not knowing that a hunted stag had ensconced himself in a deep hole under cover of the roots of an overhanging elder-tree. The deer became entangled in the net, and dragged the fisherman across the stream in its endeavour to escape. The man was so frightened that he returned home, and sent for the doctor. To his physician he solemnly confided how he had been dragged right across the river—a horrible experience indeed—and

he concluded his tale with a fearful sigh, 'It was the devil, zur; I do know it; I seed his cloven foot!'

The romance of the red deer loses much of its intrinsic charm when a herd of deer is cribbed within the barriers of a park. The carriage of the wild stag, as he halts on a spur of hill to gaze for a moment at an intruder before cantering after his companions as they troop down a rocky slope in single file, is noble and inspiring. Deer have their favourite tracks among the hills, and cross the stone walls of the Lake hills at particular points by preference. It is delightful to see a small herd daintily picking their way across the course of some small beck among the uplands. But even park deer retain much of the easy grace of the wild animals. Especially is this applicable to the calves of the red deer when they are strong enough to race after their dams across extensive paddocks. Confinement under artificial conditions affords special opportunities for the naturalist to study the growth of deer. Mr. Samuel Carter contributed an interesting paper to the 'Zoologist' of 1887, on the growth of antlers in the red deer, as based upon his observation of tame examples. This gentleman bred eleven calves in six years, one of which turned out a particularly fine animal. This animal carried nine points in his third year. Mr. Carter came to the conclusion

that the development of antler is more the result of feeding than anything else. He thought that many of the stags which Exmoor sportsmen believed to be seven years old were in reality only three or four years old, the rapid growth of the horns being attributed to the fact that 'in that country they get such good browse in the large covers of scrub-oak and other trees.' Mr. Carter found that his tame and well-fed hinds bred every year after reaching maturity. Such fecundity is, I believe, exceptional; at any rate the Westmorland hinds do not, as a rule, calve annually, though they not unfrequently do so. Mr. J. A. Houblon has recorded that a single hind, living with her own descendants alone, produced offspring nearly every year between 1877 and 1887, in Hatfield Broad Oak forest. Although this outlying hind must apparently have paired with her own progeny, no signs of degeneration appeared in the heads of the stags, some of which carried ten points when five years old. The Martindale stags not infrequently carry nine or ten points. Formerly a Royal stag was almost unheard of among the dales. The late Sir R. Musgrave of Edenhall shot the first 'Royal' obtained in Martindale within living memory. Two other 'Royals' have been procured in Martindale more recently. It is not my intention

to repeat at length the opinions of others on the subject of the development of the antlers of the red deer. Whole volumes have been devoted to illustrating the splendid growth or peculiar monstrosities which have been found in the collections of heads preserved in some of the German castles. Dombrowski's work, 'Die Geweihbildung der europäischen Hirscharten,' illustrates some rare deformities, and has the merit of being less expensive than most works of the kind. The plates are coloured and well executed. Still more important is A. B. Meyer's work upon the heads of deer, 'Die Hirschgeweih-Sammlung im Schlosse zu Moritzburg,' of which the first edition appeared in 1883, followed by a second in 1887. Many excellent remarks on antlers are to be referred to in Collyns' book, 'The Chase of the Red Deer.' Richard Jefferies never did a better piece of work than when he wrote a short volume on Exmoor 'Red Deer'; but he had no pretensions to write with authority upon such a difficult subject as heads. Collyns, on the other hand, wrote from ripe, and indeed life-long, acquaintance with the subject. A new edition of his work, which is scarce and dear, would be welcomed by sportsmen, if edited wisely. His explanation of the development of the antler, in its various stages, supplies a want which is

not satisfied by such a well-known textbook as Bell's 'British Quadrupeds.' The 'Field' has published many articles of first-rate importance concerning red deer and their heads. Mr. Allan Gordon Cameron in particular furnished a fine series of essays on this subject in 'The Field' of 1891. In the course of these, he pointed out that 'the process of growth has sometimes been confused with the vital maintenance of the developed antler. The vitality of the antler does not, however, depend upon the surface nutrients, which disappear, but upon the internal circulation, which remains. Anyone who takes the trouble to saw a cross section of the beam from the burnished and hardened antler of a freshly killed adult September stag will prove two things to his own entire satisfaction: (1) that the blood circulates freely through the antlers at this season of their complete development, when their power as effective fighting weapons is absolutely in request; (2) that at the same time the porous interior within the solid periphery occupies not less than four-fifths of the total diameter of the beam. The blood continues to flow between the pedicle and the antler till close on the time of shedding; and newly shed antlers often show blood at the base, emitting an offensive smell if gnawed or broken so as to expose the spongy interior.' A

peculiarity of the Islay Forest, about which Mr. Cameron specially writes, is the habitual recurrence of 'cromie heads' (Gaelic: cromagach, 'crooked'). 'There is no question of organic injury, no apparent reference to ancestral legacies, no reason to suppose that in-breeding produces effects in one island or district which it does not produce in another. "Cromie" antlers slope backwards, very much after one type, and are often of great beauty.' It is hardly necessary to remind the public that the colour of red deer varies not only with the summer and winter coat—for that is obvious—but also with particular districts. The Scotch stag which has been referred to as introduced to Martindale was of a greyer colour than the Lakeland stags. Mr. Carter remarks that this variation is not confined to the coat but also applies to the irides. 'Some are much lighter coloured than others, and have an eye with a straw-coloured iris; others have a dark brown eye, and the red of the bodies and the browns and grey about the face, neck, and legs much darker in tone. So far as my experience goes, I am of opinion that the dark deer belong to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and the light-eyed deer of a lighter and more mealy colour, belong to the parks and lowlands, being also larger and partaking more of the character of the

continental deer.' ('Zoologist,' 1887, p. 324.) Red deer vary little in the direction of leucotism or albinism in a wild state, while pied varieties appear to be unknown even on the Continent. But white and cream-coloured stags, and hinds also, are well known to occur in parks in England as well as in Germany. No white deer have ever been known to occur in Martindale; but Gowbarrow Park, anciently called 'Wethermlake,' on the opposite side of Ulleswater, boasts of such a distinction. Mr. Henry Howard of Greystoke Castle wrote to me four years ago, to inform me that 'The white stag came (to Gowbarrow) from Mr. Petre or Lord Petre, who used to keep staghounds. I believe the breed originally came from Germany. He lived a long time at Gowbarrow, and was killed eventually when very old (between 1860 and 1870), by the other stags setting on him and killing him. There are still several white deer, descendants of his, left at Gowbarrow.' Pure white red deer have been turned out on one or two Scottish forests; but they are seldom met with outside English parks. No doubt their peculiar appearance exposes them to dangers from which other deer are shielded by their protective colouration.

CHAPTER III

ECHOES OF THE CHASE

THE sculptured stones of ancient Scotland are eloquent witnesses to the early history of our forefathers. The carvings which have survived the vicissitudes of centuries are crude in form, as well as simple in the ideas which they serve to embody. None the less vividly do they portray for us the stormy days amidst which the Celt held his own against many odds, and ruled the shores and hillsides of his native country. The numerous hunting scenes, in particular, possess a certain fascination for men who sympathise with the hardships and perils of the chase. Full of vigour were the brawny spearsmen of those days, as bold in spearing the monarch of the glen as in fighting for the sacred cause of hearth and home. The spear was often replaced by the flight of a well-poised arrow; but whatever weapon served the necessity of the hour, the hunter's success depended

largely upon the assistance of the powerful hounds whose strength and courage were relied upon to serve their master in the moment of need,—as when a wounded hart stood at bay with head lowered in proud defiance of the horse and his rider. Whether the Celts excavated pitfalls, into which deer could be driven with the assistance of hounds, is a point upon which I am unable at present to pronounce a positive opinion. Certainly the use of pitfalls is common to many uncivilised nations; nor is it among savages alone that we find evidence that pitfalls are in favour for hunting purposes. The Chinese and the Japanese both make frequent use of covered pits to capture wild animals. The modern Japanese are adept at capturing deer, which they do in more ways than one. For example, a light is sometimes employed to attract deer within shot. In this case the hunters betake themselves to the mountains in the evening, carrying a peculiar kind of torch. This consists of a long bamboo, which bears a sort of wire cage, filled with resin and fine chips of wood. When this is lighted in a forest glade, any deer that happen to be in the vicinity gather round the mysterious light and are shot by the ambushed Japanese.

A similar device is to build a rude hut, in a line with which a dried bamboo is planted in the ground.

The bamboo is smeared with wax or resin, and serves the purpose of a torch or beacon.

The unsophisticated deer are attracted to the spot by the blaze of light, only to be shot down by the party ensconced within the hut. When pitfalls are employed, the hunters take care to excavate the soil to such a depth that the deer cannot leap out of the hole. The pitfall is carefully covered over with slender bamboos and grasses. The male deer are attracted to the vicinity of the pits intended for their destruction by means of a call, which is made from the skin of an unborn fawn. This instrument is required to enable the hunter to imitate the call of the female deer. When the wild stags hear the cry of the other sex they hasten in search of their consorts. It is while seeking for their mates that they usually drop into the pitfalls. The Chinese frequently *shoot* deer ; but the quarry more often than not is marked down in cover. Nets are then placed around the thickets, and drivers accompanied by dogs proceed to drive the deer into the nets. Mr. F. W. Styan, F.Z.S., tells me that the Chinese attach great value to the velvet of the stag of Kopsch's deer, which inhabits certain hills which lie to the south of the Yangtze valley. The velvet is in request for so-called medicinal purposes. Accordingly, the natives organise large

drives, with the aid of numerous beaters, who frighten the deer out of the small gulleys, and endeavour to force them to face the guns which are posted wherever the animals are expected to pass. The ancient Greeks seem to have depended largely upon the assistance of nets in obtaining most kinds of game. The Rev. W. Houghton has drawn attention to the fact that the Greek hunters, in the time of Xenophon, anticipated a stag-hunt by setting a number of traps in the covers which were expected to supply a stag. The engine in question resembled the devices used in Africa, India, and even Central Asia, for taking ostriches and deer by the feet. 'It consisted of a circular crown of yew twigs, twisted strongly together. In this were fixed several spikes of tough yew-wood and iron alternately, the latter being the larger; these spikes probably radiated towards the centre of the circle, but we have no accurate information on this point. We are not told what was the ordinary diameter of these circular crowns of yew-wood, but I apprehend it was about two feet. The spikes were equidistant, and so arranged that they permitted the foot of the animal to pass between them and then closed upon the leg.' To the periphery of the "Podostrabe" (or crown of yew) a strong noose or eye of twisted hemp was firmly attached,

to which again was fastened a rope of the same material, bearing at its other end a clog of oak timber perhaps 22 inches long, and 4 inches broad, with the bark still adhering to it. Such was the fashion of this instrument, and it was set as follows :—a round hole was dug in the ground, about 1½ ft. deep, equal in diameter at the top to the crown of the "Podostrabe," and gradually narrowing below ; another hole was made for the clog, and a channel for the rope. The circular part of the snare was then placed in the round hole, and the clog and rope in their respective places, and all was covered over with leaves and earth.' When a stag, trotting through his favourite pass, put one of his feet into the snare, his struggles to get away soon liberated the trap from the earth. The unfortunate animal was therefore obliged to drag the log of wood after him. His efforts to escape from the staghounds were thus cruelly handicapped. Whether the Celt employed any such primitive strategy in the chase of our Highland deer is unknown to me. Messrs. Buckley and Harvie Brown tell us that deer were driven into enclosures in Sutherlandshire, and the custom may have been recognised in other districts : 'On the top of the Little Ben Griam is still to be seen the remains of an old stone dyke, and one wonders what could be

the use of such a thing in such an apparently useless place for one ; this is all that is left of what once was a deer-trap. The deer were driven up the hill between the two dykes, which are very wide apart at the entrance, and then gradually contracted, ending in a regular *cul de sac* ; and there being no escape, unless it were over a precipice, the unfortunate animals were then slaughtered. Mr. Houston tells us that there is a very similar trap in the Dunrobin Forest on the rocky hill south of Cor Eshach ; nor, do we believe, are these the only two in the country.' ('A Fauna of Sutherland and Caithness,' p. 88.)

The ancient manner of preparing the venison was the same in Ireland and Western Scotland. The poem of Fingal, attributed to Ossian, alludes to the disposal of the carcases of hunted deer. 'It was on Cromla's shaggy side that Dorglas placed the deer ; the early fortune of the chace, before the heroes left the hill. A hundred youths collect the heath ; ten heroes blow the fire ; three hundred chuse the polish'd stones. The feast is smoaking wide.' James Macpherson explains that the feast was provided for in the following way: 'A pit lined with smooth stones was made ; and near it stood a heap of smooth flat stones of the flint kind. The stones as well as the pit were properly heated with heath. Then

they laid some venison in the bottom, and a stratum of the stones above it; and thus they did alternately till the pit was full. The whole was covered with heath to confine the steam. Whether this is probable I cannot say; but some pits are shewn, which the vulgar say, were used in that manner.' My relative Dr. John Macpherson of Sleat, in his 'Critical Dissertations on the Ancient Caledonians,' endorses with his own authority the note just quoted from Ossian as perfectly correct. He was considered a skilled Celtic antiquary. He also refers in the following words to the banquets of the Hebridean chiefs: 'The whole tribe filled the Chieftain's hall. The trunks of trees covered with moss were laid in the order of a table from one end of the hall to the other. Whole deer and beeves were roasted and laid before them on rough boards or hurdles of rods wove together. Their pipers played while they sat at table, and silence was observed by all.' He says, too, that in the reign of Robert Bruce, a party of Scots invaded the North-east of England, performing a feat of extraordinary prowess, after which the Scots withdrew to their own country. 'Some of the English, either to gratify curiosity, or in expectation of booty, took a view of the Scottish camp, and found there three hundred bags made of raw deer-skins, with the hair

on them, and all these full of water and flesh, for the use of the men. The bags were contrived so as to answer the design of kettles. They found likewise a thousand wooden spits, with meat on them, ready to be roasted.'

'In many parts of Ireland,' writes Mr. R. J. Ussher, 'large patches of blackened soil may be seen turned up by the plough or spade. These were ancient cooking-places, and the charcoal that accumulated there has imparted its colour to the soil. Such spots are termed, in Irish, "the roasting of the deer." The venison was no doubt baked in pits lined with heated stones, as the cracked and burned slabs of sandstone testify, in the same manner as is in use among the natives of Australia and other countries.' ('Zool.' 1882, p. 83.)

Some interesting particulars concerning the Highland drives for deer are to be gleaned from the MS. of Colonel James Farquharson of Invercauld. The vassals of the chief were bound to give personal attendance on the superior, with eight followers from each davoch of land, with their dogs and hounds, at all his huntings within the bounds of Mar, 'and sall caus big and put up our lonckartis for the hunting, and sall make and put furthe tinchellis at the samen, according to use and wont.' From early times the

wilds of Braemar and Glen Dee had been the resort of the Scottish sovereigns for purposes of sport, and the great gatherings of the Earl of Mar were on quite a regal scale. John Taylor, the Water Poet, was present at one of these great huntings, in the year 1618. From him we learn that the Lonquhards, which the vassals of the Earl were bound to erect at huntings, were temporary cottages (no doubt made of branches of trees or turf), intended to accommodate those engaged in the sport. The company numbered from fourteen to fifteen hundred men and horses.

'The manner of the hunting,' says Taylor, 'is this : five or six hundred men doe rise early in the morning, and they doe disperse themselves divers wayes, and seven, eight, or ten miles compasse, they doe bring or chase in the deer in many heards (two, three, or four hundred in a heard) to such or such a place as the noblemen shall appoint them ; then when day is come, the lords and gentlemen of their companies doe ride or goe to the said places, sometimes wading up to the middles through bournes and rivers ; and then they being come to the place doe lie down on the ground till those foresaide scouts, which are called the Tinckhell, doe bring down the deer ; but as the proverb says of a bad cooke, so these Tinckhell men doe lick their own fingers ;

for besides their bowes and arrows which they carry with them, wee can heare now and then a harquebuse or a musquet goe off, which doe seldom discharge in vaine; then after we had stayed about three hours or thereabouts, we might perceive the deer appeare on the hills round about us (their heads making a shew like a wood), which being followed close by the Tinckhell, are chased down into the valley where we lay; then all the valley on each side being way-laid with a hundred couple of strong Irish grey-hounds, they are let loose as occasion serves upon the heard of deere, that with dogs, gunnes, arrows, durks, and daggers, in the space of two hours, fourscore fat deere were slaine, which after we disposed of some one way and some another, twenty or thirty miles, and more than enough left for us to make merry withall at our rendevouze. Being come to our lodgings, there was such a baking, boyling, rosting and stewing, as if Cook Ruffian had been there to have scalded the Devil in his feathers.'

Traditions of lawless forays among the mountains still survive in many remote districts of the Highlands. Thus old folks say that the wild stags and hinds of Glenartney Forest used to roam at pleasure between their favourite sanctuary and Arbruchel hill. There was no fence to restrict their liberty, so the deer

crossed the burn which formed the march without restraint. Once, so runs the tale, a herd of these wild creatures trooped down to a glen near Comrie. A heavy fall of snow covered the ground and provender was difficult to find on the high grounds. During the course of the night the unexpected visitors made free with the stacks of a farmer in the glen, retiring to their snow-bound retreat among the hills before the arrival of daylight revealed the havoc which had been wrought in the steading. When the farmer discovered the loss which he had suffered, he blamed his sons for their supposed carelessness in allowing the stirks to pull down the corn. The sons disarmed his wrath by showing him the stirks securely tied up in the byres. A search soon explained the mystery; for the deer had left indisputable proofs of their nocturnal frolics in the snow. The state of the weather rendered it likely that the deer would repeat their adventure the following evening. A trap was therefore laid for the peccant quadrupeds. Some loose sheaves of grain were thrown upon the snow at one of the entrances to a byre, which was furnished with a door at each end. Ropes were attached to both the doors in such a way that they could be closed at will by the party of watchers. The evening came, and the frost was very severe. A good many

hours seemed to pass without any unusual circumstance. At last the welcome sound of the deer approaching was heard. One of the party peeped cautiously out of ambush. There sure enough were the dark forms of three or four deer crossing the snow. The animals sniffed cautiously round, and soon began to nibble at the grain. They seemed scared at finding the byre open, but gathered courage on discovering that the passage through was clear. When all the grain which lay on the snow outside the byre had been consumed, the animals followed the train of straw which led them into the byre. As soon as the unlucky animals had crossed the threshold, both doors were hastily closed. The captives passed the remainder of the night in fruitless attempts to escape from their prison. When daylight returned the fate of the poor wanderers was soon settled, though unfortunately not in a way which sportsmen could countenance.

The methods employed by poachers varied in different places. One of the commonest plans was for a couple of men to go to the hills with their guns, intending to take up their position on the line which deer would be likely to follow when returning from feeding on the lower slopes of the hill. Two hours or so after the gunners left home a boy would be dispatched, to

walk along a certain part of the hill, in order that he might quietly drive the deer back to the hill, guiding them to the vicinity of the ambuscade.

Our good Scotch folk seem to have always had a hankering after English venison—a failing which frequently induced them to take liberties when they happened to cross the Border. For example, in 1285, Robert de Brus, Lord of Annandale, and John de Seytone, his knight, were indicted before the justices itinerant on pleas of the Forest of Cumberland; the charge formulated against them being that, when hunting in Inglewood, they had taken a doe and a red deer 'priket' in excess of their allowance. Again, in 1353, Edward III., at the request of his cousin Edward de Baliol, granted pardon to the nobles and others who had hunted with him on various occasions in Inglewood forest, and had slain fourteen stags, two bucks, eleven hinds, and sixteen red-deer calves in summer, and sixteen hinds, fifteen red-deer calves, twenty-one bucks and does, and seventeen fawns, in winter; these facts being attested by indenture between the King and William Lengleys, chief forester of Inglewood. Just two years later, on the 3rd of December, 1355, we find Edward III. again granting pardon to the same parties, who on this occasion

had killed nineteen harts, fourteen hinds, seventeen calves, two bucks, four 'sourells,' thirteen does, a 'priket,' and two fawns. Even in the days of Queen Elizabeth, the Scottish nobles gave trouble of a similar description. It had been an ancient custom of the borderers to send to the Warden of the Middle March, 'to desire leave that they might come into the borders of England, and hunt with their greyhounds for deere, towards the end of summer, which was never denied them. But towards the end of Sir John Foster's gouvernment, when he grew very old and weake, they took boldnesse upon them, and without leave-asking would come into England, and hunt at their pleasure, and stay their owne time; and when they were a hunting their servants would come with cartes and cutt down as much wood as everyone thought would serve his turne, and carry it away to their houses in Scotland.' This abuse of courtesy was sharply rebuked by one Sir Robert Carey, who appears to have succeeded to the inefficient Sir John Foster. Carey gave the bold strangers formal notice that he was 'no way willing to hinder them of their accustomed sportes to hunt in England as they had ever done, but withall I would not by my default dishonour the Queene and myselfe to give them more liberty than was fitting: I prayed him

therefore to let them know, that if they would, according to the antient custome, send to mee for leave, they should have all the contentment I could give them ; if otherwise they would continue their wonted course, I would do my best to hinder them.' Finding them defiant, Carey adopted strong measures. He sent out a party of troops, who surprised the hunting gallants in the midst of a fresh foray. The military 'broke all the carts of the trespassers, and carried a dozen of the principal raiders to the Castle of Witherington,' where Carey was quartered. He detained the Scots two or three days, and then sent them home, having exacted a promise that they would not hunt again in England without formal permission. The pledge was honourably kept, and Carey often hunted with them for two or three days together, 'and so wee continued good neighbours ever after.' But James I. took considerable umbrage at the treatment meted out to his subjects—in fact he made a formal complaint to Queen Elizabeth. 'The Queene and Council liked very well of what I had done ; but to give the king some satisfaction to content him, my two officers,' says Carey, 'were commanded to the Bishop of *Durham's*, there to remaine prisoners during her Majesties pleasure. Within a fortnight I had them out againe,

and there was no more of this businesse.' King James himself seems to have had a penchant for English deer. I find that a warrant was issued on his application in 1593, for the delivery of deer to persons to be appointed by Robert Bowes, Esq., the Queen's ambassador with the said king, in order to the storing of some ground of the king in Scotland—viz. for Marwood Park, ten; Marwood-hag Park, ten; Little Park, called Wollhouse, five; West Park, and Langley pertaining to Raby, ten; Brancepath Park, the east and west park, thirty-five. But the English had always a certain amount of difficulty in preserving the deer in their own parks, far away from lawless Scots. Especially was it so in the time of the Civil War. The Royal forests suffered as much as the parks of private gentlemen. Thus, in July, 1642, we find that Francis Beard, an under-keeper, made an affidavit, that he had seen Richard Barnard and others hunting deer in Windsor Forest. In November the same year, John Saunders, deputy-keeper under Sir Thomas Manwaringe, made an affidavit that one Hercules Trew had presumed to kill a stag in Old Windsor Park. In April, 1643, Thomas Shemonds, another keeper, made an affidavit that John Moore and others had coursed the deer in the Great Park

at Windsor with greyhounds. Similar outrages were committed in different parts of the country. For example, certain disorderly persons broke into Somersham Park, where they killed the deer belonging to the Earl of Suffolk. The House of Lords issued an order that the sheriff of the county should arrest the offenders. They ought to have been summarily apprehended, and committed to prison; but the sheriff showed the white feather. He reported to the peers that he sent his officers to the house at Old Hurst where the delinquents were supposed to be, but the representatives of the law were refused admittance. 'The offenders are desperate men, and cannot be apprehended without raising the power of the county.' Fresh directions were therefore sought as to the course to pursue. Perhaps it would be wearisome to pursue the subject further. In peaceful times plenty of pleasant sport was found in the great parks of southern Britain. In this connection I may refer to an epitaph in Hault Hucknall church, near Chesterfield: 'In Memory of Robert Hackett, Keeper of Hardwick Park, who departed this life Decr. ye 21, Anno Dom. 1703.

Long had he chased
The red and fallow deer,
But Death's cold dart
At last has fixed him here.'

A more ambitious effort found a place in the church of St. Nicholas, Nottingham, to the credit of a once famous poacher :

Here lies a marksman, who, with art and skill,
When young and strong, fat bucks and does did kill.
Now conquered by grim death (go reader tell it)
He's now took leave of powder, gun, and pellet ;
A fatal dart, which in the dark did fly,
Has laid him down among the dead to lie.
If any want to know the poor slave's name,
'Tis Old Tom Booth, ne'er ask from whence he came.
He's hither sent ; and surely such another
Ne'er issued from the belly of a mother.

This epitaph was composed some time before the hero's death, and so delighted was he with it, that he had it graven upon a stone in anticipation of his own demise. He died in 1752, in his seventy-fifth year.

DEER-STALKING

BY

CAMERON OF LOCHIEL

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

'I HAVE had the happiness of being a deer-stalker for more than half a century.'

These were the words used by the late Horatio Ross, the most famous gentleman athlete and all-round sportsman whom the present century has produced. The occasion was his examination by the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Game Laws (1872–73), of which I was myself a member, our chairman being the late Mr. Ward Hunt. The reply made by Mr. Ross to the opening question of our chairman sounds simple, and to an ordinary reader of the Blue Book would no doubt be passed over as nothing more than the usual perfunctory reply to a series of questions addressed to persons who give evidence before a select committee. To those who were present and in sympathy with the veteran sportsman, there was something more than mere words. This happened twenty-five years ago, and

the scene is as fresh in my memory as if it had occurred last year. The kindling eye, the beam of happiness with which his face glowed—as if during those few seconds while he was speaking there passed before his mental vision many an episode of forest-life, of sporting adventure in strath and glen, in the wild and varied scenery to be found in the districts from Reay in the north-west to Invermark in the south-east, where he had been in the habit of enjoying his favourite pursuit—confirmed me at all events in the opinion, which I have always held, that deer-stalking is the king of wild sports.

As this estimation of deer-stalking may not be shared by sportsmen generally, a comparison between its merits and those of other sports pursued in this country may serve to justify the opinion which I have expressed, and may perhaps prove interesting to the reader.

Without attempting anything like a classification of the various kinds of sport which are to be found in the British Isles, it will be admitted that four stand out pre-eminent. These are deer-stalking, grouse-shooting, salmon-fishing, and fox-hunting. Each of these has its respective advocates, who will enthusiastically proclaim the superiority of their favourite amusement. I have myself at various times enjoyed

them all, and do still when I get the chance, though I do not claim to be a 'professor' in any one of them. To arrive at a fair conclusion on their respective merits, it would appear advisable to enumerate certain tests by which to try each of them separately, and then see which gives the best general result.

Take as the first test *the degree of pleasure derived from success.* Judged solely from this point of view, grouse-shooting is nowhere. Given good weather (of which more hereafter), your keeper will generally tell you what the bag is likely to be ; and the capabilities of your party as to shooting being also known, it follows that the result is pretty well ascertained beforehand, and the pleasure of a successful shoot can hardly be as great as if it were uncertain or unexpected. In salmon-fishing and fox-hunting there is always more or less luck and uncertainty, and this enhances the satisfaction derived from a 'real good day.' In salmon-fishing success, of course, depends on the number of fish you kill and on their weight. Thus the pleasure of a good day is not momentary like the killing of a fine stag, but is spread as it were over the whole day, recurring each time that a fish is landed. I doubt whether the aggregate amount of pleasure derived from capturing ten or a dozen

salmon is equal to the supreme happiness of standing over a splendid royal which has been the object of your ambition to secure not only during that particular day but perhaps for weeks previously. Fishermen will hardly dispute that on a good day, when fish are really taking, you pull them out of the water as a matter of course, and your chief thought is how to land each quickly so as to be ready for another. In fishing too (I allude to it in a whisper) there is occasionally a spirit of—let us call it rivalry—which can hardly be said to yield the highest form of pleasure. Be this as it may, I cannot believe that the enjoyment derived from the landing of any number of salmon can equal in intensity that which the deer-stalker experiences when, after hours of continuous excitement and toil, he is at last rewarded with a well-deserved success.

It is somewhat difficult to apply this test to fox-hunting, but I think it will be admitted by those who love both sports that a ride home in the dark, on a Highland pony under the circumstances just described, is accompanied with pleasanter feelings and less sense of discomfort than the return on a tired hunter after the best run of the season.

But, it may be urged by the advocates of the superiority of other sports, if the pleasure of success-

ful deer-stalking be so great, the disappointment of an unsuccessful day must be correspondently greater. It is fair, therefore, to take this as the next test. Here salmon-fishing, as grouse-shooting in the previous test, may be put out of court. No one will deny that an absolutely blank day's fishing is a disappointment unmitigated by any other circumstances attendant on the sport. The fisherman has been engaged in monotonous exertion all day long, and experiences the sensation of having wasted his time as completely as if he had been using a pair of dumb-bells. To the grouse-shooter the disappointment is also severe, since, as has been already shown, he had reason to expect better results, and he is probably compelled to admit that the cause of failure is preventable. The fox-hunter, on the other hand, though the hounds may not have killed their fox, or even given a good run, though foxes are scarce, and scent bad, may have thoroughly enjoyed himself. He has had at any rate pleasant companionship ; he may have tried, and been pleased with, a new horse ; while in spring, when the days are long and the weather generally fine (though bad for scent), there is no reason why he should not have thoroughly appreciated the mere ride.

But for the deer-stalker, if he is not driven home

by mist or has tailored his stag, there is a pleasure to be derived from the most disappointing day with which no other sport that I am acquainted with can compare. The incident of weather as a test will be dealt with presently, and 'missing' a stag involves a question of skill, an element common to every form of sport, and which cannot be taken into account in the competition which is now under discussion.

The deer-stalker, according to my own experience, starts in the morning always in a cheerful frame of mind. His cares and troubles, if he has any, are left at home. He anticipates a delightful day whether he has luck or not, and he is rarely disappointed. He gets plenty of the most healthy kind of exercise, in the purest of atmospheres, among the grandest scenery to be found in Britain. Unless stalking in a bad forest or on sheep ground, he spies deer, and from that moment till the shot is fired which is to decide whether he is to go home a happy man or the reverse, his attention is so absorbed that hours fly like minutes and minutes like seconds. Watching a herd of deer, sometimes for hours, is often sufficient enjoyment for those who love to observe the habits and note the instincts of wild animals. Then there are the difficulties with which the deer-stalker has to contend before getting within shot of the deer; the exciting

moment when the sudden appearance of a hind or a sheep, or change of wind, threatens to upset his most carefully considered strategy and spoil his stalk ; then the last crawl to some particular boulder or heathery knoll within shot of which the big stag is grazing, or the more easy approach to an overhanging precipitous rock where he may lie down in comfort and 'wait for him to rise,' and, lastly, when he does rise, the thrilling moment before the shot is fired. 'To be or not to be!' Can any man who has gone through such scenes and experiences say that even an unsuccessful day in a deer forest is not a thing worth living for?

Let us now take weather as an element in the consideration of the problem. As regards the comfort or discomfort of pursuing any particular form of sport in bad weather, there is not much to choose. The grouse-shooter, perhaps, experiences most inconvenience in this respect. He requires to use his gun, or at any rate be ready to use it, frequently, and in rainy weather he cannot protect himself as efficiently as the stalker, the fisherman, or the hunter. There are also minor troubles in regard to his ammunition, injury to the game, and so forth. But as regards the practical effect on the sport itself, I think that, judged by the test of weather, deer-stalking more than holds its

own. Bad weather has, of course, a different significance in dealing with different forms of sport. Rain and mist are its most objectionable forms for stalking and shooting, frost, of course, for hunting, and bright sun for fishing. Now, my own experience, and I believe that of most deer-stalkers, is that more deer are killed on a wet, stormy day than when the sun is shining and there is not a breath of air. Naturally, this does not apply to days when the rain is accompanied by thick mist and you cannot use your glass. Nor does it apply to forests where deer are very scarce, still less to stalking on sheep-ground when the glass is hardly ever in its case. But once find your deer on a wet day, and you make a much better job of it than you would do in very fine weather. Deer are neither so restless nor so much on the alert. I remember once, when staying with a friend who owns one of the best forests in Scotland, refusing to go out on a day when it was raining 'cats and dogs' and blowing half a gale. There was a young relative of my host staying in the house, a very keen sportsman, whom I knew would be sent out if I declined, so I let him have the chance. He accordingly started, and came home, having killed in fair stalking six stags, one of them with a magnificent head, and fired off seventeen cartridges. The next

day was even worse. I again declined. My young friend took my place, and got two more.

Allowing that a thick mist makes stalking impossible, the same applies to grouse-shooting in both its forms, while it certainly cannot be said that a wet windy day is favourable to that pursuit. Nor can it be alleged that the number of hopelessly misty days during the stalking season is equal to the number of days of actual frost when hounds do not attempt to go out, and the fox-hunter's stud of horses are kept idle in their stalls. As regards fishing, how often does it happen that a high rent is paid for a bit of first-class water, for a month say, and the unfortunate lessee at the end of it returns home without having killed one fish, or perhaps even wetted his line if the drought has been continuous !

Yet another test—that of sociability. Here fox-hunting stands out pre-eminent—no other sport can touch it—grouse-shooting comes next, and stalking and fishing nowhere. But as a set-off against this advantage the following point must be scored on the other side. Fox-hunting is the only one of the four sports under discussion in which the individual plays absolutely no part at all. Unless he is a master of hounds and hunts them himself, he has no share in the business—would that this was *always* realised !—

and whether he is well or badly mounted, whether in good form or not—indeed, whether he comes out or stays at home—makes no difference in the result of the day. His pleasure—and an intense pleasure it is—consists in seeing hounds work and in endeavouring to be with them so as to lose as little as possible of that enjoyment; but if the fox is killed or run to ground after a burst of twenty-five minutes over the finest part of Leicestershire, it is not owing to his own skill or science—the credit rests first with the hounds, and next with the servants of the hunt.

Some of my readers may think that the matter of 'costs' should be taken into account in giving judgment, and may consider that if this were done it would tell heavily against the deer-stalker. I hold that cost does not concern the issue which is here raised. But even if it were otherwise, deer-stalking would not suffer by comparison as much as is commonly supposed. You may enjoy the sport for a rent of any amount from 2,500*l.* down to 250*l.*, the latter on sheep-ground of course. A fancy price is, no doubt, given for certain places with special advantages in no way connected with sport; but the above is a fair range, and is not very different from the range of cost in the case of the others. But no true comparison can be made as regards cost. In the case of deer

and grouse, you allow for entertaining your friends, which is rarely done by the fox-hunter and not to so great an extent by the fisherman. Besides, I am dealing with the respective merits of four kinds of sport, and it is possible to appreciate the whole four at your friend's expense without any outlay of your own.

If the above analysis of the respective advantages of each of the forms of sport to which the attention of readers of this chapter has been directed be at all correct, no difficulty will be found in assigning to each 'points of merit.' Judged by this method, it will be found that deer-stalking wins easily. Perhaps on the whole fox-hunting comes next, while the remaining two may be bracketted as 'equal.' I do not for a moment expect that the devotees of fishing, grouse-shooting, or hunting will admit the superiority of any other rival. Indeed, if they were to do so they would not obtain my sympathy. Enthusiasm in sport is as necessary for its successful prosecution as it is desirable, and this may be said of all other undertakings in which we wish to excel. Such enthusiasm is not likely to be lessened by attempts on the part of those whose affections are elsewhere bestowed to justify themselves by mere argument. If a debating society were to select for the subject of discussion 'Which is

the finest sport to be found in Great Britain?' the debate might be carried on for a week, and at the end of it probably every member of the society would be found to hold exactly the same views as when it began. (Perhaps the same may be said of other subjects of discussion held in various sorts of debating societies.) I do not, therefore, expect, nor do I wish, to *convert* any of my readers. I hardly hope to instil into the minds of ardent fox-hunters or keen fishermen the love of deer-stalking which I myself feel. But I do ask them to admit that in the foregoing pages the advocacy of my favourite pursuit is conducted with fairness—that it is proper for whoever undertakes to write on any branch of sport to show that he is enthusiastic on his subject, and that however great may be the differences of opinion on the relative merits of the hill, the moor, the river and the field, all true sportsmen should unite in maintaining the distinction between what is unworthy or effeminate, low or demoralising, and that which conduces to health and manliness, to vigour of body, to generosity and unselfishness.

CHAPTER II

THE MANAGEMENT OF DEER FORESTS

A MORE perfect system of intercourse between the Highlands and the southern parts of Great Britain, together with frequent discussions, from its social aspect, of the propriety of preserving deer for purposes of sport, have familiarised almost everyone with the expression, so that the question 'What is a deer forest?' is now seldom asked by persons of an inquiring turn of mind. It is generally understood that the definition is misleading, inasmuch as there need not be, and seldom are, any trees within the area of pastureland set apart for the use of deer. At the same time the fact that these areas should be known by the name of Forests serves to confirm the opinion, if confirmation be necessary, that vast regions of the Highlands were in former times covered with indigenous forests of the various species of trees, whose descendants, in sadly diminished numbers, are found at the present day scattered

among the valleys and on the hillsides of most of our northern counties.

There is, perhaps, a greater difficulty in answering the question, 'What *was* a deer forest?' In former times, so far as can be gathered from old writers on the state of the Highlands, and from modern authors who have studied these old writers, the condition of the country differed very greatly at different times. First, we have the old forest laws, which, though not quite so barbarous as those which prevailed in England during the dynasty of her Norman kings, were yet of a severe and stringent character. In these early periods of history there existed certain royal forests set apart for the diversion of kings and nobles, while there were others, consisting of lands not belonging to the sovereign, but to great barons, to whom a sole right of forestry was granted, which right of forestry often conferred a right of servitude in his favour, that extended in some instances over lands belonging to other proprietors. It will be easily understood that such a system was not conducive to peace or good relations between the baron and his neighbours, and that retaliation, feuds, and bloodshed were its necessary accompaniments. It was found necessary to put an end to this state of matters; the neighbouring proprietors obtained gradually

charters or grants of forestry over their own estates, and as the numbers of these charters increased, the few remaining rights of the great barons over the lands of their neighbours fell into desuetude and were no longer exercised. It is a singular circumstance, that while these alien rights in deer have long ago been extinguished, those over salmon still exist. There are now many persons enjoying the right by royal charter of salmon fishing in rivers, both banks of which belong to a different owner, or perhaps to two different owners. The explanation probably lies in the fact that in the one case the land was required for other purposes besides deer and wild animals, while salmon form the only valuable property to be obtained from rivers.

It seems tolerably certain that, owing to the strict preservation of deer in these large tracts of country, stragglers from the vast herds which roamed over them made their way to other places where, though not so secure of protection, they found abundance of food. Indeed, it is a question whether they did not fare, in summer at any rate, even better than in the royal forests. At the time we are speaking of there were very few sheep in the Highlands. Cattle formed the almost entire stock of the country. It has been calculated that not more than a tenth of the available

pasture of the hills was consumed by the stock which grazed there in summer. Certain favourite spots known as 'sheilings' were no doubt eaten down pretty bare, but the highest hills, where the sweetest grass grows among rugged rocks and boulders, were probably left untouched by any four-footed animal except deer and mountain hares from one end of the year to the other. From this point of view it may almost be affirmed that, in the days of which we are speaking, the whole of the northern part of Scotland might be described as one vast deer forest, though of course the numbers of deer, except in the case of preserved districts, were small in comparison to what is now found even in the most recently formed, and therefore the worst stocked, of existing forests.

Towards the end of the last and at the beginning of the present century what may be described as a revolution took place in the economy of the Highlands by the introduction of sheep-farming on a scale, and under conditions of management, such as had never previously prevailed or been even thought possible. Under this system many existing deer forests were stocked with sheep, and as the lands which then carried black cattle, with a few goats and small sheep, received similar treatment, and no longer presented to those deer that were in the habit of frequenting them

the attraction of 'clean' ground, the numbers of these must have also diminished; so that it is probable there were in the northern parts of Scotland, at the period of which I am speaking, fewer red deer than there are at present, or than there had been in former times.

The process of re-clearing some of these sheep walks, and the formation of fresh deer forests, began about twenty or thirty years later. The causes which led to these operations are not so easy to determine as they are in the clearances of the present day, or those within the last twenty years. A newly developed taste for sport may have had a good deal to do with it; the invention, though then in its infancy, of steam engines as a propelling power by sea and land no doubt lessened the difficulties of locomotion, and afforded to enthusiastic sportsmen opportunities which had never before occurred of visiting the Highlands, making themselves acquainted with its romantic scenery, now so familiar to tourists, with its natural history and its resources from the point of view of a sportsman. It is a curious fact, and may seem incredible to many who observe the 'craze' for shooting which is found among the youth of the present day, that at the beginning of this century it was not always thought 'good form' for an owner of

a deer forest, holding a high social position, to go out stalking himself. The old Lord Lovat, grandfather of the present peer, told me a long time ago what struck me then as so curious that I have never forgotten it. He said that when he succeeded to his estate, his guardian, whose name I forget, expressed the hope that he would not so far derogate from his position as to think of going into the forest to shoot deer himself. Such a practice, he said, was neither dignified nor customary. A forester was kept for the purpose, and it was his duty to supply the house with venison. Lord Lovat, of course, paid no attention to the formal though friendly advice of his guardian, and the crack of his rifle was periodically heard in Glen Strathfarrar for the next fifty years. There were few better shots, and there was no finer sportsman than the old Lord. I asked him whether the suggestion made by his guardian had any real foundation, and if he was sure it did not originate in some ideas peculiar to that worthy gentleman. He said 'no,' he believed the views held by his guardian, though not perhaps universal, were largely shared by others, and were certainly prevalent in his own district.

It is also probable that the writings of Sir Walter Scott had something to do with stimulating a desire to visit the scenes described in some of his works,

though it can hardly be supposed that the stag hunt as portrayed in the 'Lady of the Lake' seduced many votaries of that sport to exchange the heaths round Ascot or the green pastures of the Harrow country for the steep sides of Ben Ledi or the wild fastnesses of the Trossachs. If literature had any effect in this direction, foremost among the publications of the day must be placed that delightful book on deer-stalking by Scrope. Allusion to this work will be made in a subsequent part of the present chapter.

From about the year 1860 to 1874 a lull took place in the process of clearing ground for deer. During that period sheep-farming was highly profitable, while the ground on which this industry could be less successfully prosecuted from considerations of climate had been already converted into deer forests. The close of the Franco-German war, and the adoption of a mono-metallic currency on the Continent, together with increasing importation of wool, reduced the profits of sheep-farming. The 'big' men from the Cheviots and Dumfriesshire, who had made their 'pile' during the American Civil War and succeeding years, threw up their farms, and there was no one to take their place. The owners of these farms had thus no option but to take them into their own hands, which required a large capital, or, if they got the opportunity,

to convert them into deer forests. The latter course was largely adopted, and has been continued, though, of course diminishing as the available area diminished, up to the present time. It may safely be affirmed that almost the whole of the land in the Highlands suitable for deer (by which is meant land where sheep cannot be made to pay) is now cleared, and it is a subject for regret that there are signs of a disposition to convert good grouse moors into bad deer forests. In such cases the rules which ought to govern the formation of a forest are violated either through ignorance or obstinacy, and the result must be disappointment, loss, and vexation. I propose to deal with the social aspect of this question in a subsequent chapter. Here we are considering it from a sporting as well as a financial point of view.

There are certain conditions in the creation of a deer forest which are necessary and unmistakable. Even if these conditions be observed, success is not always to be obtained. Some unforeseen change in the management of a neighbouring estate, a wrong boundary to the newly formed forest, an erroneous estimate of the relative attractions of the ground to stags or hinds, and other local peculiarities, may interfere with the success of the operation ; but failure, where knowledge exists and is given effect to, and when

advantage is taken of the experience acquired by others, is rare.

Thus, no one ought to think of making a deer forest on ground which is completely surrounded by sheep. To begin with, the amount of fencing would be enormous; without fencing the sheep would crowd in on every side, and it would then be useless for your purpose. Nor is it easy to see how such ground is to be stocked, or if at length it were to be stocked with deer, how long the process would last.

It is essential to make sure that there is good wintering ground belonging to your proposed forest, otherwise you will never get the best heads or the heaviest bodies, while if you trust to your neighbour to winter your deer, you ought to be sure of him. If of a jealous disposition, he may give trouble, forgetting that though wintering is all-important, still the growth and well-doing of a stag depend to some extent on his condition at the beginning of winter, and that the migration of a certain proportion of the deer that wintered with him to the newly made forest in the early summer relieves his own ground, and thus improves its capabilities to keep them all in good condition in winter.

But supposing a case where the above may not apply, or where your neighbour will not see it in that

light, or is a jealous sportsman, he may cause much annoyance either by the drastic method of running up a deer fence all along your march, or by walking a man up and down throughout the stalking season.

If possible, it is very desirable in forming a new forest to be reasonably assured that it will not develop into a 'hind' forest. This assurance is, however, not always to be obtained, and one is very apt to be deceived. Deer are curious beasts: the ground which one fancies must prove attractive to stags sometimes becomes a favourite resort of hinds, and is thus useful for stalking only towards the end of the season.

A striking instance of the extreme difficulty of ascertaining with certainty whether a tract of ground which it is proposed to clear for deer will prove to be the resort of stags or hinds, occurred in a case of my own some years ago. A large tract of land, occupied by one of the large farmers from the south to whom allusion has been made, fell out of lease. I had no option but to let it as a forest to a neighbour, and it was so let. It carried a stock of about 8,000 sheep, and consisted of four very large corries on the one side, with the face of a long glen on the other—the ridge of the latter, which formed the head of the corries, having an altitude of nearly 3,000 feet above sea-level. A more perfect place for the formation of

a forest could not be found anywhere. In the neighbourhood, but not quite contiguous, a range of hills with a south exposure had been cleared for deer about ten years previously, and was then fairly well stocked with stags as well as hinds. But the main ridge was not nearly so high as on the other ground, and a sheep fence ran along its whole length. Nor is there a single big corrie on the whole ground. It was an experiment, making a forest—but as it only carried some 3,000 sheep and lay very convenient to my own residence, I thought it worth trying, and the result has proved a success so far. But what would happen if this other ground was to be cleared? It appeared to be almost certain that its large extent, its magnificent corries, its greater elevation and richer pasture must attract every stag, and that the older forest would be denuded of everything but hinds during summer and autumn. This was my own opinion, as well as that of all my foresters, and of those of my friends whose judgment was likely to be sound. The result proved that we were all wrong. The new ground seduced none of my stags. At first it looked as if the anticipated effect of the operation was going to be the exact reverse of what was predicted, and that while there were more stags than before on the older and smaller forest, hinds were about to take possession of

the high green slopes and deep corries which we all thought more suitable for their lords and masters. But after a few years, and under the careful and wise treatment to which it was subjected, the advantages of the ground were discovered and appreciated by stags, and it was here that the famous twenty-pointer of 1893 was killed. Nor has this desirable result been accompanied by any corresponding deterioration in the forest which is retained in my own hands. But it is none the less puzzling.

There are, of course, numerous minor points which should receive consideration in determining whether ground proposed to be afforested would prove suitable for the purpose. Thus, if you get a high flat corrie full of springs, nothing can be better, unless at the bottom of the corrie you find a large flat moss growing plenty of the spring bent or cotton grass—the earliest and most useful of all the grasses. This is best of all, and such a moss will hold deer at all times of the year. Deer are very fond of old natural birch wood, even though trees may be gnarled and decayed and few in number. The grass is generally very sweet under them, and stags especially love to have something to play with and rub their horns against. Such situations, moreover, are generally well sheltered.

Patches of old strong heather are also very useful both for shelter and as food during severe snowstorms, but these are not likely to be found on ground grazed by sheep unless it has been in the proprietor's own hands. Much of the close growing heather on rounded rolling hills is entirely unsuitable for deer, and, as I have indicated in a former part of this chapter, I have no patience with those who spoil a good grouse moor in order to boast that they are owners of a deer forest. Besides, in such a case the grouse must be exterminated as far as can be done, or stalking will be impossible. You cannot destroy the grouse on your own moor, whether by encouraging vermin or killing all the hens, or by simply not shooting them, which is perhaps the most effective method, without injury to your neighbours. Now, good fellowship, and a perfect understanding between neighbours, is desirable in all forms of sport. Where deer are concerned it is almost essential. It will be seen in a subsequent chapter of this book that personally I go so far as to urge that some sacrifices should be made in order to secure a friendly feeling between brother sportsmen, and that these should be extended even to neighbours who are neither deer-stalkers nor grouse-shooters, but who have other interests in connection with the occupation of land.

Having given the above indications of how a deer forest may be most advantageously formed, let us proceed to consider its management. Here I find myself confronted with a difficulty, which the indulgence of the readers of these pages must help me to overcome. The subject is not a new one. It has been dealt with by recent writers possessing both ability and experience. Among others may be mentioned, besides Scrope, whose work can perhaps hardly be termed recent, Mr. Malcolm of Invergarry, and Mr. Grimble. But the completest and most exhaustive treatise on deer and deer forests is that written for the Badminton Library by my dear friend the late Lord Lovat. My difficulty, therefore, in following so competent an authority lies in the obligation to avoid repetition of what has been so well written on the one hand, and yet not to pass over matters which are essential, if the attempt be made at all to present to my readers a full and faithful description of all that pertains to sport in connection with red deer.

Now, as regards the proper management of deer forests, let us consider first 'How not to do it.' When I was a boy my favourite book out of all that were to be found in the school library was 'Scrope.' Fascinated by his graphic description of the glories

of pursuing the red deer in the wilds of Atholl Forest, and knowing that in all probability, when I grew up to manhood, I should have the opportunity of enjoying the sport for which even at that early age my heart yearned, I pored over the pages of my favourite author, and of all the various descriptions of forest life and of stalking with which they teemed, better than the legends, the poetry, or the anecdotes, I loved to read and re-read Chapters VII. and IX. of that work. Both of these chapters give an account of a deer drive in Glen Tilt; and so well is it told, so thrilling was the interest which I felt in the adventures of Tortoise and Lightfoot, as well as in the splendid performances of Tarff, Derig and Shuloch, that at this day, and with the experience acquired during many years of managing forests, I can hardly bring myself to criticise the proceedings which I then looked upon not only as quite proper but almost sublime.

The drive described in Chapter VII. probably embraced a very large tract of country, perhaps half of the whole forest of Atholl. The rifles seemed to have been posted, not only in front but on the flanks of the drive, as well as with the advancing line of beaters. One of the latter party (Scrope himself) did some business on his own account, wounding the

'muckle hart of Braemar' and then slipping a lurcher after him. This operation was however hardly successful, for instead of the dog chasing the deer it was the other way on, and through the telescope the gallant Tarff was descried being chased 'all ow'r the moss' by the infuriated stag—so the 'ferocious' Derig was also loosed. The dogs, however, again got the worst of it, and after breaking bay away they go right up the steeps of Ben-y-venie, and we hear of them no more till the end of the day. A little later Tortoise wounds a fine beast, black from rolling in the bog. There seems to have been no lack of dogs on this occasion, for Shuloch is immediately slipped after the wounded deer and they disappear down Glen Mark. Immediately afterwards the main herd cross the Tilt, and the rifles open fire. As soon as the deer are out of range, lurchers are slipped *at the herd*, and a fine description is given of the performances of Douglas, Percy, and Croime, of the bringing to bay of two more noble harts, and of their death amid the picturesque surroundings of the Tilt.

This is all very interesting and very magnificent, *mais ce n'est pas la guerre.* No forest could stand such treatment for long. Besides the ordinary disturbance caused by moving deer against their will and then opening fire on them from places of con-

cealment, in the account of the two drives in Scrope they were apparently fired at from all sides. When the sportsman had done with them, dogs were slipped after the herd, who probably thought they had seen the last of their tormentors and were free to push on to some more hospitable country. Thus, besides the shooting and the shouting, the tainted air and the suspicious dots on the skyline, this immense herd, comprising, perhaps, half the deer in the forest of Atholl, had finally to escape as best they could from the attack of the savage dogs, while from every glen in that part of the forest resounded the deep bay of one or other of their relentless foes.

The scenes here described no doubt filled the lords and ladies who were the guests of the Duke of Atholl with delight and admiration, but one would like to see the expression on the countenance of the present owner of the forest, and to hear his remarks, were a suggestion made to him that a similar performance should be enacted for the entertainment of his friends.

At the present day driving is rarely resorted to. Even in the large forests where the practice formerly prevailed, it has now been generally abandoned. In Atholl, of which I have just been speaking, the forest is never driven more than once in the season,

and not even then unless the wind be from a favourable quarter. In the forest of Mar they seldom drive large tracts of country, but deer are frequently moved, which, of course, does no injury to the ground, the operation extending only to a very limited area. The practice has also been abandoned in the Black Mount, and with good reason in this case, for the result of constant driving about twenty years ago injured the forest to such an extent that many years elapsed before it recovered from the effects of it.

Driving in forests of less extensive acreage was never practised largely, though there are some exceptions. In Mamore the late Mr. Thistlethwayte used to drive a good deal, but his whole ground was enclosed by a six-foot fence, so it really did not much matter what tricks were played on it. When Glen Strathfarrar was occupied by Mr. Winans, driving was almost the only method pursued; but the whole proceedings under that *régime* were peculiar, and, as far as sportsmen are concerned, it would be well if the incident of Mr. Winans's tenancy could be blotted out of the annals of Highland sport. In common justice, however, to that gentleman's memory, it should be remembered that no inconsiderable part of his large fortune was left in the district, distributed among the various classes of the community.

However much we may condemn 'hashing' a deer forest, as in the case described by Scrope, or even perpetually harassing the ground, as was done at the Black Mount, there is no reason to think that, provided you have a very large tract of ground to deal with, that the wind is in the proper quarter, and that the operations are conducted quietly and methodically, any harm would be done to the forest by driving it say once, or at most twice in the season.

There are few more beautiful sights than a herd of stags moving up a hillside or over a skyline, and no more exciting moment than that when they approach the point where a decision must be made by their leaders as to the course which it is deemed safest to take. Such a point there must be in every deer drive. It may be on a ridge or at the bottom of a glen, in the middle of the burn running out of a corrie, or on the shoulder dividing one corrie from another. But some freedom must be, and, according to the mode of driving now generally adopted, always is, left to the herd which it is your object to bring to the passes where the rifles lie in ambush. It is, of course, impossible to force deer to go the way that is wished, as was done in the brave old days when a 'Tinchell' was organised for some royal visitor, and the drive occupied two months, drivers being counted

by the thousand, and game of all sorts in corresponding numbers. A hunt on such a scale is now out of the question, and those who wish to amuse their guests with a deer drive must make the best of the means at their disposal.

Enjoying some such freedom of action, deer in a modern drive seem to be given a better chance for their lives than is the case in stalking, or even in the pursuit of any other wild animal so far as I know. Therein consists more than half the pleasure and the whole of the excitement of the sport. Anyone, even he who has never before witnessed a drive, can see it for himself and understand the situation. He observes the herd come over the skyline; a forest of horns; they do not dwell there long, but descend the slope, stopping perhaps for a while on the shoulder between two corries. Our imaginary sportsman may be posted within a rifle shot of the burn at the bottom, or some way up the brae face on the side of the glen opposite to where the herd are now standing, with their heads turning in every direction. It matters not where he is stationed, the question he is engaged in putting to himself is 'Will they or will they not?' come within shot of him. He may continue putting this question for a long time. Those who have been engaged in moving the deer are perhaps

miles away, the latter have had a steep climb on the other side before they reached the top, they are in no hurry now, and they purpose looking well before they leap. The turning point, so far as our friend is concerned, may be on this very shoulder, or it may not have come yet. But come it must sooner or later, and it is this uncertainty which prolongs the excitement, and when all goes right, adds intensely to the pleasure of a successful 'right and left.' Now suppose the herd, having at length made up their minds, or, like some politicians, had this function performed for them by their leaders, briskly descend the hill in the very direction desired by our friend, who we will imagine is stationed half-way up the opposite slope, the turning point is still not reached. But it must come when they reach the burn. The excitement increases as the deer draw nearer. If a true sportsman, and not jealous, he will say to himself, 'I may not get a shot, these deer may cross the burn and come up on this side in a slanting direction. In that case the next gun will get the shooting. Well, never mind, it can't be helped, and I have at any rate got a good view of the sport whatever may happen.' So he waits on, confident that, should they cross, though he may not be the favoured sportsman, the deer he sees cantering straight towards the line of guns must come

within range of two at least, if not three of the party, pleased for the sake of his host that the drive is going to be a success, determined if needs be to rest satisfied with the enjoyment which he has already derived from scenes of forest life which have been opened to him, and resolved not to spoil the pleasure of whoever may be on this day the favourite of fortune by impatient references to his own ill luck, or ill-timed after-dinner grumbling.

In such a position as I have imagined in three out of four cases all goes well. The herd cross the burn and go right through the line of guns. But sometimes, from a single act of carelessness or from an unforeseen accident, and often for no accountable reason, at this last supreme moment the drive is a failure. The herd of deer come down to the burn, but do not cross it. They stand on the brink, and again seem to take counsel. They look long and steadily in front of them and then—ominous sign !—turn their heads and look upwards, the way they have just come, for a short time ; next they turn their heads half round and gaze steadily over their right or left shoulder. You pull out your glass to try to find out what they are staring at, but you see nothing, nor do the deer—that is the worst part of it. Then perhaps one or two begin to pick up the sweet grass on the

bank of the burn while the rest turn round and round, the leaders of the herd still staring in the same direction, though their bodies may for the sake of comfort have changed position. All of a sudden, in the twinkling of an eye, without any apparent reason, up go all their heads together, each deer looking in the direction he happened to be facing, in another second the leaders trot off in the direction in which they were so earnestly gazing; 'that trot becomes a gallop soon,' and there is an end of the drive and a bitter disappointment to everyone engaged in it. The herd will probably be met by one or two of the drivers, but no power on earth will now turn them. They have chosen their road and intend to stick to it.

The drivers are, of course, so far apart when a large tract of country is gathered that deer may, if they like, break out at any moment of the day's proceedings. I have imagined their doing so at the last possible moment. But it is for this reason that drives should be conducted with the utmost quietness.

The notion which it seems to me should, if possible, be impressed on the deer, is that in the course of his morning's feed or his mid-day siesta, he sees a man whom he takes for a shepherd, walking carelessly along the skyline. Joined by his comrades he strolls

off into the next corrie, where he finds some more friends who have been similarly disturbed. They join forces and, with the wind well in their noses, go up a steepish hill to a pass which leads over the ridge into another glen. They look up at the skyline and, seeing no one, proceed on their way. The forester knows that the deer would not at any rate go over this ridge, he wishes to make them take the pass, and if he placed men about all the tops indiscriminately he would only frighten the deer and prevent the development of the notion that they are not being driven, and that the figures moving on the skyline are only 'casuals'—shepherds or tourists. In this way by great quietness, free use of the watch and strict obedience to orders, the foresters continue to make the deer believe that they are moving of their own accord, or at most only getting out of the way of a few accidental intruders upon their solitudes.

By the exercise of caution and punctuality on the part of the men, who are told off to show themselves in various places, the deer are pushed or coaxed rather than driven to the passes on the burn-side, shoulder or top of the hill where the guns are posted, and here we may take leave of them. Driving deer forms so essential a part of and is so intimately connected with the management of a forest, that the

subject has been treated in this chapter rather than in a subsequent one which is devoted to the practice of stalking.

Let us now turn to the strict question of managing a deer forest. What is its proper treatment if the owner is anxious to preserve and improve the stock which it carries? First, as regards preservation. It goes without saying, and is well understood by all those who have ever had anything to do with deer, or indeed with any kind of game, that the ground must not be overshot, that a proper number of stags, such as experience has shown the place will stand, ought to be killed annually, and no more. Nothing need therefore here be said on this point, except that the quality of the stags killed should be looked to as well as the number. Personally, I think it is a mistaken practice, though one which is followed by many from an honest, sportsmanlike feeling, not to fire at a stag unless he is a good one. Others, on less defensible grounds, think a great deal too much of the weights, and are afraid of spoiling the *average* by killing a beast of thirteen or fourteen stone. When a chance of getting one of this kind is deliberately and voluntarily neglected by the 'gentleman,' his conduct should not certainly be called in question by the owner of the ground, but it is not wise to give strict orders to the

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forester not to allow anyone to shoot at a stag under fifteen stone, as is sometimes done. I am of opinion that such a proceeding is distinctly injurious to the ground, and I am quite certain that it is hardly fair towards those friends who perhaps seldom get an opportunity of bringing down a stag of any kind. In a large herd of stags it is often extremely difficult to 'get at' the best deer, but in such cases it is seldom you have not the choice of seven or eight of those nearest to the point beyond which it is impossible to crawl, and if the whole herd consists of 'trash' it is perhaps because it has been the practice for many years to shoot all the growing stags with good but not fully developed horns. In some forests, and notably in the Reay, long tenanted by the Duke of Westminster, it has been the practice to encourage the shooting of old inferior stags, and to spare for a certain number of years those with good growing heads. The result has been excellent. It is not, however, always easy to distinguish an old deer that is 'going back" from a young stag. The horns on the latter are often furnished with points that look what is termed 'rotten,' because they seem so; but this appearance is deceptive, and as often as not denotes youth, not age; the rotten look of the points being really the blood in the horn, indicating vitality and

immaturity. We find in works on red deer many tests given by which to distinguish an old from a young stag, but I believe most of these are fallacious. Smoothness or roughness of horn certainly has nothing to do with the age of the animal ; it depends partly on the nature of the ground where the animal has been living. If he frequents a wood he rubs his horn smooth against trees ; but independently of this it is the nature of some stags to have rougher horns than others, and the discrepancy is also induced by the differences between certain soils and pastures. According to my own experience, two tests alone are infallible, but unfortunately these can only be applied after the animal is in your larder. The skin of a young stag comes off much more easily than that of an old one, and the distance between the skull and the coronet of the horn is much greater. But in a general way it may be said that short sharp points indicate age, more especially if the presence of smooth excrescences on one or both horns can be detected, these latter being the remains of additional points carried by the stag when in his prime.

But, after all, if the rule laid down by the owner of a forest is that inferior stags may be shot when better beasts cannot be obtained, it is certain some of these will be old deer 'going back.' I remember

it used to cause many a laugh among my friends who visited Achnacarry habitually, when some new hand came in from the hill in the middle of dinner, and said very gravely that he was afraid he had killed rather a small beast, but that the stalker had begged him to tell me that it was well out of the way, as it was an 'old deer that was going back.' This familiar and oft-used explanation was supposed by the 'old hands' to contain more of the elements of consolation than of natural history, and was provocative of mirth rather than credence.

Hardly less important for the well-being of a deer forest than the number and quality of the stags killed during the season, is the question of when the season itself ought to end. There is no close time for deer fixed by statute, and the determination of how late stalking should be allowed in the case of stags must be left to the judgment of the owner of the forest. This is somewhat unfortunate. It leaves the responsibility of deciding on a subject which affects others besides the individual immediately concerned. Thus, supposing one man allows no stag to be shot after October 10, but the owner of a neighbouring forest continues to stalk up to the 20th, it is clear that, having in view the roving propensities of stags at that period, some of the best deer which fre-

quented the ground where the close time began on the earlier date, and that might have been secured by its owner or his friends, are very likely destined to fall to some rifle in the forest where the later date is adopted. It is true that the quietness produced by a cessation of shooting may to some extent counteract the effects of a difference in the date when stalking is at an end; but that a sense of injustice is often felt, no one will, I think, be disposed to deny.

Still more blameworthy is the practice which too often prevails on sheep ground where 'deer are occasionally found.' The sporting rights on such places are at the present day let for no inconsiderable rent, and proximity to a regular forest increases the value of the shooting. Unfortunately, it is seldom found that the owner of the sheep ground makes provision in the agreement that the tenant shall not kill stags after a certain day, and the latter frequently goes on blazing away at every stag that comes within reach of his rifle long after the venison is quite unfit for food. If remonstrated with, he replies that unless he shoots stags after others have stopped, he cannot 'get his number,' as during the earlier part of the season hardly any stags are to be seen on his ground. This is no answer at all; for if his assertion is correct, it simply follows that the ground is worth very little, and the

tenant ought not to have paid so much rent for it. There are of course exceptions, but in most cases of sheep-ground stalking the deer found there are bred in the neighbouring forest, are preserved, and may be fed in winter by its owner; and, seeing that there are rarely any watchers on the sheep-ground, and that it is disturbed on almost every day of the year by shepherds, it is evident that, were it not for the adjoining forest, 'getting his number' would be a difficult matter even if our sportsman remained on the ground from August 1 to the end of November. The owner of the sheep-ground should also remember that he gets two rents for it—one from the farmer, and another from the shooting tenant. Under these circumstances it does not seem unfair to ask him to do—what, by the way, is my own practice—viz. fix a date, as nearly as possible identical with that which is prevalent in the district, after which stags must not be killed; and, having done this, he is no doubt entitled to ask as high a rent as he thinks he can get.

The quality of the stags in a forest may be improved both as regards heads and bodies by a change of blood. This can be effected either by importing from a park two or three stags in the spring—when their horns are shed, and they are more easily transported—placing them in an enclosure during summer,

and turning them out among the hinds in October; or by introducing hinds, carefully marking them in the ear to prevent their being accidentally shot. The former plan is, however, the best, and the result desired is of course more rapidly attained. Where possible, the stags may be confined in a large park or field, and a number of wild hinds placed with them; these may be turned out just before calving, and others put in to take their place; or if the park be large enough and of a suitable character, they may be allowed to drop their calves there for two seasons, and then turned out with the calf of one year and the year-old of the previous season at their foot. This will save the trouble of driving wild hinds into the paddock each successive year. There is a prejudice among many owners of forests against introducing park or foreign deer into the Highlands, but it exists only with those who have not tried it. So far as I know, the results obtained when a fair trial has been allowed have been quite satisfactory.

A subject connected with the management of a deer forest, which has frequently been discussed from different points of view, is as to the proper proportion of hinds to stags which should be killed in a season. There can surely be little doubt that it is impossible to lay down one inflexible law where

conditions vary so greatly as is the case here. If the whole country had been afforested for many years, and no change from sheep to deer or *vice versâ* had taken place, it would be easy to determine the relative proportion of stags and hinds which ought to be shot; but where new forests are being formed, each case must be judged according to the circumstances which prevail. It has been already observed that these new forests get stocked sometimes with a large proportion of stags, sometimes with a numerical superiority of hinds. If the latter, then it is clear these hinds must come from the adjoining forests, which are thus proportionately depleted, and few need then be killed until the process comes to a natural end. The theory here put forward is obviously sound, and I have myself tested it in practice. The average number of hinds which have been killed on the ground here (cleared and sheep ground) during the last thirty years has not exceeded half that of stags. We have no reason to suspect any poaching beyond an occasional deer on the sea coast in winter—and yet there is no overcrowding of hinds, and the part of the ground which was always forest has, if anything, fewer of them than when I first came, and on none of it are there too many. In the older and larger forests which are not affected by

recent clearances, stag for hind should be the rule; but this again must be varied according to which sex predominates. Thus in what is called a 'stag' forest three stags to two hinds, or even less, is often found sufficient; and in a 'hind' forest, unless severely thinned, stags will be crowded out more and more, and the sport will be poor and disappointing. When a limited or moderate number of hinds have to be killed, those should be selected which are yeld, but if a larger slaughter must take place this is not possible. The necessity of killing hinds with calves at foot is unfortunate, both on account of the poor little calf that can hardly be expected to pull through the winter without the protection of its mother, and also because the venison of a milch hind is of course inferior in quality. This cannot be helped, and it should be remembered that there are throughout the land plenty of poor people with large families to whom even a milch hind would prove a most acceptable present. On no account should a deer of any kind be ever left on the hill. If the tenant of a forest cannot afford the trifling expense of keeping a pony or two to carry away the venison, he ought not to take a forest at all. If he is the owner, he ought to be ashamed of himself. So far as I am aware the practice does not *now* prevail in either quarter.

A discussion which found a place in the columns of the 'Field' about two years ago, shows that some difference of opinion exists as to whether the 'heads' of the present day are or are not superior to those that were obtained in former times. On this question there is probably no better living authority than the Earl of Tankerville. I remember its forming the subject of conversation among a party that was staying at Chillingham a few years ago, and our host, in order to prove his contention that heads were stronger and better in his younger days than they are now, showed us one of a stag which he had shot in Ardverikie Forest when it was tenated by the Marquis of Abercorn. It was, if I remember rightly, a ten-pointer, but for size, weight of horn, and symmetry, it would be hard to beat it. Lord Tankerville told us that at the time when it was got this head was by no means considered one of the very best, though he did not deny that even then it was not surpassed by many.

The assertion that the heads of the present day have deteriorated is of course difficult to prove. I myself am inclined to believe in its correctness subject to this qualification: an understanding should be come to by the disputants on the number to be selected for comparison. It makes the whole difference whether we are dealing with the half-dozen best

heads of the season or with half a hundred. If the latter be the number adopted, it will be difficult to maintain that the heads of fifty years ago would stand comparison with those of the present day, seeing that the number of stags killed now is far in excess of what was formerly obtained in a season. It stands to reason that, the larger the number of specimen heads which are taken, the more unfavourably must the test operate on the period when the total number from which they are selected is relatively small.

At the present day it is calculated that about 4,000 stags are killed annually. Fifty years ago, owing to various causes besides the smaller number of deer forests then in existence, it is probable that not more than one stag was shot for every six at the present time. Now if fifty stags' heads be taken for purposes of comparison, that number will form about one-thirteenth of the total killed in 1845, and only one-eightieth of the bag of 1895.

But if ten or a dozen be the number adopted, there are reasons for supposing that the heads of former times were the best. If they were not, and this as has been said is difficult to prove, they ought to have been. It has been already mentioned that land which is now cleared was then in a large measure utilised as sheep-walks. This land was, for the most part, remote,

inaccessible, and rarely trod by any but the most enterprising deer-stalker. Such solitudes, abounding in high deep corries where the sweet 'natural grasses' (as they are called somewhat inconsequently by shepherds) are found, were frequented by stags—sometimes singly, more often in pairs or three together—who seemed to prefer their own society to that of the herd. These were mostly old deer, and of course among them were some of the best, as well as some of the very worst heads in the district. These cunning old fellows frequented the same favourite hills year after year, until killed by someone possessing the nominal though rarely exercised right of shooting over them, and who hearing of a 'terrible big stag' in such and such a corrie, determined to brave the discomforts of sleeping in a shepherd's hut—they *were* huts in those days—and to become the envied owner of such a grand trophy. Those who have successfully pursued this branch of the science of deer-stalking among the highest and wildest of hills, with the odds far more in favour of the deer than is the case in a forest, will agree with me that its pleasures are unequalled by any other form of sport.

But the difficulty first of finding a single stag in such a vast tract of country, and then of getting within shot of him, when large numbers of sheep—

probably at that time of year, one to every two acres—are grazing on the hills, not as deer graze in compact herds, but scattered evenly over the ground, renders the position of the wanderer a pretty safe one. Not so when he goes a-wooing. It is then that such a stag generally meets his doom; but notwithstanding this danger, his chance of getting through the autumn untouched or not fired at was better than if he had selected for his haunts places more frequented by deer-stalkers.

The question will present itself to many of the readers of this chapter—How is it that such a stag as is here described remains for the whole summer on ground which must be constantly disturbed by dogs and shepherds? As a matter of fact, such high corries as those referred to are seldom visited by shepherds, when once the final gatherings for clipping are over, until about September 20. At that period the whole country is in a state of movement, caused by gatherings for the autumn markets. These are followed by further disturbances when the lambs are collected to be sent off to the low ground for the winter. But between July 20 and September 20, or about those dates, these high hills are left tolerably quiet, except certain places where lambs are herded to make them acquainted with their future home.

Of course a shepherd must look round his sheep

occasionally, but there are strong reasons for believing that deer who frequent sheep-ground are not greatly scared by the intermittent appearance of the shepherd and his dog. Indeed, I have been told that they actually recognise the man, and when the latter comes in sight, a stag will only move off to the next corrie in a slow majestic manner and be back again next day. Be that as it may, there is no doubt whatever that when deer see their danger they are less alarmed than when they suspect it, or when it comes upon them suddenly. I have myself shot grouse over dogs for half an hour with deer looking on and apparently enjoying the sport within half a mile. Of course they move off eventually, but they do so in a very different way, and go a very much shorter distance, than they would if the cause of disturbance had been the head of a man appearing on a knoll a hundred yards off followed by the crack of his rifle.

It seems therefore a fair conclusion to arrive at, that many of these sheep-walks were a kind of sanctuary for deer ; that they were only used as such by a few stags, as there would not be enough grass for many ; that certain of these stags, for reasons which we cannot fathom, preferred solitude to the companionship of the herd ; that they were not much disturbed by shepherds until the time when they naturally

became restless and would move off of their own accord; that in the days we are speaking of such stags were seldom pursued by sportsmen; and, lastly, that when they were successfully stalked, some of their heads proved exceptionally fine, from their having been allowed time to arrive at maturity.

Some remarks as to feeding deer artificially in winter seem not inappropriate in dealing with their preservation in forests.

The practice is resorted to in some deer forests, not in others, and there is a twofold reason for it. You may either feed your deer to keep them alive, or to improve their condition and add weight to their horn.

In certain forests, especially those which are situated in the Grampians—that is, the succession of Estates which are under deer, on the east side of the Highland Railway from Dalwhinnie to Grantown—feeding would appear to be a necessity; at any rate, provision must be made for feeding, and I suppose that a winter rarely occurs when it is not advisable to 'help' the deer to some extent. It will be observed, in looking at a map of Scotland which shows all the deer forests, that a sharp and easily noted division exists between the east and the west. The Highland Railway marks pretty nearly where this division lies,

Ben Alder and Coignafearn perhaps being the only doubtful cases. Roughly speaking, therefore, feeding is resorted to in the East Coast forests as a matter of necessity, while expediency governs the decision arrived at by owners of West Coast forests where the snow does not lie so deep or last so long.

Occasionally, as in the winter of 1894–95, it becomes necessary to feed deer even in the least exposed places down to the very seashore on the West Coast, but the necessity for doing so rarely occurs, and there were to my own knowledge some forests where the deer got no artificial food during the extreme rigours of the winter mentioned.

Some owners of forests, on the other hand, make it a practice to feed their deer, not because it is necessary in order to keep them alive, but to improve them, and thus obtain better bodies and stronger heads. Others, again, while admitting that good results do follow the adoption of feeding as a system, reject it on account of the expense, or because they find a difficulty in conveying the food to those places where it would be most usefully consumed. If feeding stuff be laid down on ground which is mostly frequented by hinds you cannot expect to improve the condition of your stags, as these may not get a share of what is provided, while, if they are mixed

it is impossible to drive away the one without at the same time depriving the other of what you intend for his consumption and benefit.

There can be no doubt that, where the owner of a forest chooses to go to the expense, and has the means of laying down food in suitable places, those deer that get it must gain in weight both of body and horn during the following season. Spring is the ticklish time of year for all animals in the Highlands. If deer are very much reduced during the winter, they are bound to suffer when the grass begins to grow. If they are in good order they proceed to lay on flesh at once, and thus gain the full advantage of the summer grazing. It is in spring that those cold east winds prevail, often accompanied by hot sun in the daytime, which parch the ground and give it a white desert-like appearance. A well-wintered stag must be better able to stand this particularly trying period of the year than one which has only just been able to pull through the cold north-westerly blasts of wind bringing sleet, snow, or rain, which may not improbably have formed with little interruption the weather of the past four months.

As regards the kind of food which it is proper to provide, hay is far and away the best where it can be procured, and when it can be transported to the

desired locality. It is filling as well as nourishing, easily found by the deer, and greedily eaten. There is also no danger of losing any of it in soft snow, though it is apt to be spoilt by rain. But there are few forests where much bulky stuff can be conveyed to the proper feeding places during deep snow when it is mostly required, and fewer still when this can be done without heavy expense. Beans and Indian corn mixed form a nourishing and comparatively cheap diet; but I am given to understand that locust beans are more commonly given than any other feeding stuff, and no doubt they possess a sweet taste which proves attractive to most animals. Indian corn is of course the cheapest form in which artificial food can be given.

I have heard of three objections to the practice of feeding deer in winter. 1. That it undermines their constitutions. 2. That if they get into the habit of being fed they always expect it and do not take the same trouble to provide for themselves as they would otherwise do. 3. That the stronger beasts get all the food which is laid down, while the weak deer, for whose benefit the practice is mainly adopted, get very little.

In regard to the first two objections, it is very likely that the deer which have been artificially fed

during one winter may look for a continuance of the practice in the following year. In all probability, except in the case of a change of management in the forest, the supply of winter food is in fact continued, but if not it is hardly to be supposed that its discontinuance would so demoralise the recipients of this to them unnatural form of nourishment as to bring into temporary disuse the instincts for foraging for themselves with which nature has provided them.

Nor is there any reason to fear injury to their constitutions. After all, the amount of extra feeding which each stag gets must be very small—just enough to keep him in good heart and no more. If highly fed for a succession of winters, such a change would take place in their constitution that the wild red deer of the Highlands would probably be no longer recognisable, and would certainly starve if left for a single winter to their own resources.

The third objection has some force, but it applies to the feeding of all animals, and is not sufficient to justify a discontinuance of the system of helping deer to get through the winter if such is thought in other respects desirable.

One important provision for the maintenance of a proper stock of deer *of the right sort* in a forest is the formation of a sanctuary. The term, of course,

explains itself, though the explanation is not always justified by procedure.

When I was quite a beginner at the business I thought a sanctuary was a necessary appendage to every deer forest, and accordingly dignified by that name a small corner of the ground much favoured by stags on account of its rough heather and thick natural wood.

Now whenever the weather was unsuitable for stalking, and the question was asked in a house party, more distinguished by youth than by judgment or experience, 'What shall we do to-day?' the answer as frequently as not was 'Let us drive the sanctuary.' This was of course reducing the whole thing to an absurdity, but the absurdity was in the high-sounding appellation, not in the frequent disturbance of this particular bit of ground which was so small in extent —not a tenth part of an adjacent area with similar features—that it did not matter what was done on it. The place was very handy to the house; you could do it after lunch, and take any ladies who did not mind sitting on damp heather to see the sport. They could either ride or row in a boat, or go one way and come back the other, and in short it was very good fun. We are older and wiser now, but alas! do we have the same fun? In a former chapter I ventured

to criticise the proceedings in the Atholl forest in the days of Scrope. I wonder whether Tortoise, in the happy hunting grounds—to the enjoyment of which he is, we may hope, admitted—knows that I too have sinned against the very rules which I have laid down as the canons of true deer forestry; that in the days of my youth I have gone out to the very middle of the forest with a couple of pure-bred deerhounds, accompanied by anyone of either sex who had sufficiently good wind, a supple figure, and active limbs, and coursed, yes, actually coursed, a cold stag—generally unsuccessfully—sometimes bringing him to bay, very rarely pulling him down. Let us draw a veil over these days of long ago with their joyous frivolities. Ah me! where are the good comrades of those times?

To return to the matter of sanctuaries. I believe most deer forests are furnished with a place of safety where no rifle is ever allowed to be fired—at any rate until the latter part of the season—and to which deer know that they can resort and be at peace when moved from other parts of the ground.

I am inclined to think, though I know the opinion is not shared by many experienced foresters, that sanctuaries are just a little overdone. Of course, it is not suggested that they are injurious to a forest.

If the whole place was sanctuary it would be all the better, as far as collecting deer is concerned; but what is the use of collecting deer if you are not to shoot them?

Now, in judging of where sanctuaries are beneficial to the ground and yet do not interfere with legitimate sport, we need not take into account the largest forests, such as Mar, Atholl, Black Mount, the Reay, and one or two others. Here such an institution possesses all the advantages of protection to deer, and there are no attendant drawbacks in connection with their pursuit. The forest being so large, you can form your sanctuary wherever it is found most convenient, either in the centre or on the side where there is danger from a doubtful neighbour or an objectionable wind. There is plenty of ground left on which to stalk, and, above all, if the sanctuary should happen to be disturbed from any cause intentional or accidental, *you don't lose your deer*; they still remain on the ground, some are shot (or shot at), and the rest go back to their old home.

In a small forest these conditions are not to be found. A sanctuary in such a place is always getting in the way. You have often to go round it to get on to your beat. It draws all the best stags, and you dare not move it for fear of the deer leaving the ground

and going on to that of your neighbour. Nothing is more tantalising than to peep over the ridge which bounds the sacred spot and to find it crawling with good deer, while on the ground you have been stalking there is nothing to be seen but 'trash.'

Worst of all, when the rutting season begins many of these good stags that have been so carefully nursed leave the sanctuary *and* the forest far behind them, and get shot by others who have had no share in preserving them. Nor does it help to keep up the stock of deer to any great extent. After the season is over and the wandering stags return home, that particular part of the forest is no quieter than the rest; indeed, the latter having been eaten less bare may prove the most attractive during the winter months.

There remains the case of a medium-sized forest. Here it is impossible to lay down any rule which is equally applicable to all forests coming under that category. Some may have corries so situated that they seem to be marked out for the purpose of providing a place of safety for deer when disturbed or moved from the surrounding hills. The prevailing direction of the wind will of necessity form no inconsiderable element in selecting the spot which is most suitable for the purpose. Deer as a rule move up wind, and if they are not pleased with the ground

traversed will often go a long way before they settle. It is obvious that a well-chosen and properly managed sanctuary must please them, and if it lies in the direction they are taking, deer are certain to remain there when it is reached. It is said that deer will go down wind towards a place where they know they are safe. They may do this occasionally, but very rarely, I am inclined to think, when alarmed by a shot or the sudden appearance of an enemy.

When moving of their own accord they must sometimes travel on a side or down wind, otherwise, with a continuance say of a westerly wind for three weeks, most of our deer would be found on the shores of the Atlantic.

A medium-sized forest may be so constituted that a sanctuary cannot be conveniently formed. For instance, a long glen, both sides of which are under deer, does not afford the protection and isolation required for the purpose. Disturbance on the opposite side of the glen from that portion of the ground selected as a place of security must occasionally take place. A couple of shots fired there, and the sight of a herd of deer running away in a state of alarm, would soon clear a sanctuary thus situated. The ground chosen with this object in view should be as compact as possible. A large round hill, with corries on three

of its sides, forms an ideal place for a sanctuary. Even if only two of these corries can be spared it would do well enough. Then, if by any accident deer are disturbed in one of them, they are very likely to move into the next and remain there.

Wherever the sanctuary may be, it is desirable that some part of it should be protected from whatever wind may prevail. One corrie of unusually large proportions may suffice if the burn which drains it has a twist or curve during its course, or if there happens to be a rock or spur on one of its sides so as to form a sort of false corrie affording shelter when the wind blows straight up the corrie. Without this, though the ground may be perfectly sheltered as long as the wind blows from three quarters, it will be too much exposed towards the remaining 'airt,' and deer will probably move off. If the exposed side is to the north, a cold north wind is pretty sure to send every beast over the top for shelter, while, if facing south, the driving rain which often accompanies a south-west wind will bring about the same result. The ground should therefore, if possible, be provided with shelter from wind coming from these two points of the compass.

Sometimes even in the largest forests good stags get congregated in such vast herds in these places of

refuge that the rest of the ground is almost denuded, and such a state of affairs is very trying to the sportsman. In these circumstances, it becomes necessary to 'move' them. The operation should be performed by the head forester, who should choose a day when the wind is favourable and take care that no one is out on the ground likely to be occupied by the broken-up herd. It is almost unnecessary to add that on no account must they be fired at.

The consideration of this branch of deer forestry leads us to another detail connected with our subject, namely, the proper distribution of 'beats' in a forest. Intermingled with this is the respective responsibility of the men in charge of the different beats—in other words, whether it is best to have one head forester under whose orders all the other stalkers must be, or to give to each stalker a beat of his own and make him responsible only to his employer. As a rule, but certainly subject to exceptions, the latter plan would appear to be the most satisfactory.

If each stalker be responsible to and under the orders of the head forester, he has distinctly to serve two masters, the head forester and their common employer. This is, no doubt, the case in game preserving, but the difference between pheasant-shooting and deer-stalking, as regards control and indeed in

every respect, is so obvious that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon it. Independent beats and separate responsibility induce a spirit of emulation among the stalkers, the effect of which is to correct many faults which a different system is apt to produce. Take one instance of this. Suppose you have a stalker who thinks the chief end of life is to give his 'gentleman' a 'chance,' and having accomplished this goes contentedly home with a feeling of duty performed and without any twinge of conscience as to what kind of a chance it was, or whether a long shot fired perhaps in the dusk was likely to be equally satisfactory to the gentleman out on that beat next day, or for the interest generally of the ground under his charge. Is it likely that the man in charge of a beat, who is anxious to make at the end of the season a good record of stags killed on his ground, would encourage random shooting at long range in the dusk? Assuredly not, but on the other hand if he refrains too much from giving shots it is of course impossible to produce as good a record as he would otherwise do. On the whole, it seems tolerably certain that a man in a position of responsibility will work his ground fairly and properly, just as his employer would wish it to be worked, so as to give sport to his friends without injury to the forest.

I have said that there are exceptions to the system which is here advocated, but it is not easy to name them. Each owner of a forest must be the best judge of what is required in his own case. I can only generalise and state what is in my judgment best if circumstances allow of the adoption of the plan recommended. But one exception, before leaving this part of the subject, may perhaps be mentioned, and it will probably suggest others to the readers of this paper. When only two men are required, and where one of them has to live in an out-of-the-way place, perhaps in a bad house without a croft attached and to which there is no road, or when the keeper has to lodge and board with a shepherd, in such a case you cannot get the class of man who is fitted to take on his shoulders the full responsibility of working his beat. It is better that he should receive orders from the head forester, for he is really more of a watcher than anything else, though often quite as good a stalker as his superior. Indeed, all Highlanders in that position of life seem to be born stalkers.

To return to the subject of 'Beats' themselves. There are two ways of managing a forest in this respect. One way is to divide it into very large beats and send one rifle out on each beat, leaving it to the judgment of the stalker to determine according to

wind, or to what was done there on the previous day, or to other circumstances, how the ground should be worked. The other way is to subdivide a beat into two, three, or four portions, giving to each subdivision its fair turn, but not allowing—except in the case of following a wounded deer, and not always then—the party that is out on one of these sub-beats to encroach on another during that day. Which of these two methods should be adopted depends absolutely and entirely on the nature of the ground. It would be as absurd and impossible to deal with the whole ground that is under one man's charge *as one beat* in the forest *here*, as it would be to take the opposite course in a forest like that of Glen Feshie. Of course where a beat is subdivided no part of the ground is disturbed on two consecutive days. Thus if there are three subdivisions, each of these is worked twice in the week, on the supposition that the wind and weather are suitable for stalking.

I cannot conclude this chapter without a word of warning against surrounding a forest with a deer fence. This practice is very rarely adopted, so the word *protest* need not be employed. A forest thus treated is ruined for certain. It is only a question of time. No fresh blood can be introduced, and the

heads and bodies get smaller and smaller until they reach the size of island deer, whose diminutive proportions are evidently the result of the natural operation of the laws which apply to in-and-in breeding.

CHAPTER III

THE PRACTICE OF DEER-STALKING

ANYONE who undertakes to write an essay on the practice of deer-stalking must be prepared to encounter some amount of criticism from a double standpoint. He will either be censured for giving too elementary a character to his treatise, or else for furnishing his readers with facts and information with which they are already acquainted, and with giving advice which is not required. In other words, the writer should begin by asking himself this question: For whom is this essay, or article, or treatise intended? Am I going to write for the beginner, for the man who has never been out stalking—who knows absolutely nothing about it, and who wants to learn how the thing ought to be done; or should I address myself to the experienced sportsman who has, or thinks he has, nothing to learn, but who might like to while away a spare half-hour by taking up the volume of 'Fur and Feather' which treats of his favourite sport? Now I

have seriously asked myself this question, and have come to the conclusion that, in spite of the proverbial difficulty in pleasing everybody, it will be best in this case to adopt what I hope will prove a happy medium —giving *some* information that may be useful to beginners, though not needed by many of my readers, and offering a few hints which may not be unacceptable even to veterans of many a season's campaign.

The elementary requirements of deer-stalking—'what shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed'—and armed?—are to be found treated of in various books which have been written at different times, and not a season passes without the appearance of a contribution to one or other of the sporting papers or magazines relating to these requirements, and containing, generally in an amusing enough form, some simple rules which the budding deer-stalker would do well to follow.

But my chief reason for passing lightly over these aspects of my subject is, because the beginner will learn all that he requires to learn, in order to make a start, from the stalker who accompanies him, far better than he could from anything which he may acquire from a perusal of these pages.

Such matters, except perhaps the 'arming' of our sportsman, may be called the 'trivialities' of deer-

stalking. Interesting some of them are, no doubt, and their discussion may properly and pleasantly form a feature in the chat of the smoking-room ; but solemn admonitions as to what is best to eat for breakfast or to take out for lunch, appear to be somewhat unnecessary, as is also a lecture on early rising ; a description of the number and kind of pockets your tailor should put into your shooting-jacket, a disquisition on the respective merits of boots or brogues, and on the different kinds of 'tackets' which may be applied to their soles—all these seem to be out of place, and indeed ridiculous, in such a treatise as this purports to be.

Eating and drinking is a matter between the man and his digestion. No other person has any right to interfere. What suits one stomach does not suit another. Thus, personally I am a very bad hand at breakfast, and when that breakfast is served at an early hour am no hand at all at it. But on the hill I used to get ravenous at lunch, and the thin biscuit which suited some of my friends would not have done for me. These used, of course, to eat a hearty breakfast, but they were no harder on the hill than I was, nor less knocked up after an exceptionally long day.

Then again, as regards clothes. One often reads

in books or articles professing to give minute directions on such subjects, that the deer-stalker should endeavour to wear a suit of a colour resembling the particular ground on which he intends going. This is all very well if you are sure that the whole day will be spent in one place. But this rarely occurs. In pursuit of deer, it is often necessary to leave the granite ridges of a hill, and descend to the black peat bogs which are to be found at its base. What then becomes of the beautiful light-grey tweed in which you had encased your manly form, with the idea of producing the nearest approach to harmony with the colour of the primitive rocks or the ptarmigan, among which you intended passing the day? Take the following instance, which is surely not uncommon. A corrie clothed with the short sweet herbage which makes its appearance green as a lawn, while at the bottom of the corrie lie boulders of every size and shape, rolled down from the top in some convulsion of nature, or by the slower process of disintegration during countless ages. Beyond this, again, moss and heather. Now suppose a party of stags is spied from the ridge, and lying, as is often the case in the daytime—not in the corrie, but on the moss at the bottom—let us say within half a mile of the ridge, and in full view of the whole ground by which they

must be approached. Well, the stalkers begin their descent, they must keep as close as possible together, moving inch by inch with eyes fixed on the deer, and especially on those whose heads are turned upwards, if lying down; stopping whenever a feeding stag raises his head, or a recumbent one 'looks on the alert.' The 'gentleman' clothed in a suit of Lovat mixture, and conscious that its colour perfectly harmonises with the verdure of the corrie down which he is crawling, rejoices that he (or his valet) had the forethought to make that particular selection when he dressed in the morning. But presently he finds himself among the grey stones at the bottom. Here crawling is not so pleasant. Instead of the recumbent position and easy slide down a soft velvetty and comparatively dry turf, he finds himself on his hands and knees, crawling on sharp stones and endeavouring to avoid the pain of contact by a series of short jumps, or perhaps saving his knees at the expense of his hands, and showing a good deal too much of that part of his person which in the previous part of his adventure was more favourably situated. Now he regrets the Lovat mixture, and would fain have worn that other suit of grey and white check, which, being new and smart, was reserved for a picnic with the ladies on an off day.

However, the zone of rock is not very wide, and he presently reaches the black peat beyond. Here he is probably safe from the deer he is after, as, if not covered in the case I am supposing, and at the distance given, it is hardly likely that he can approach much nearer, though the largest part of the half-mile was intended to be from the bottom of the steep part of the corrie to where the deer are lying. But he may still require to crawl in order to escape observation from some other beast that is now in view. Here he wishes for a further change of costume to suit the dark ground on which he is lying, and longs for the heather mixture which adorned his person the day before when he was shooting grouse. Not being a circus-rider possessed of three sets of clothes which can be stripped off one after the other, he has to be satisfied with the garments in which he originally started, and in all probability these are good enough for the purpose. The fact is that for stalking any neutral coloured or check tweed will suffice; but for those who are very particular as to the invisibility of their dress I would suggest wearing jacket and waistcoat of one pattern, and knickerbockers of another. However well chosen in order to suit the ground your clothing may be, it must, more or less, form a spot on the background. It is obvious that by

dressing yourself in the manner suggested, the spot, as observed from any given distance, will be half the size of that caused by wearing a suit of 'dittos.' In other words, the figure of a man dressed in clothes all of one design is visible at twice the distance that he might be 'picked up' by deer if he had a coat and waistcoat of a different pattern from that of his nether garments.

A more serious matter, no doubt, is that of the rifle with which a deer-stalker should be armed. But on this subject opinions differ widely, and it would not be easy, without alluding by name to makers of various rifles, to go thoroughly into the subject. This hardly comes within the scope of my present purpose, nor indeed do I feel competent to undertake the task. Some kind of what is called an 'Express' rifle with a flat trajectory, carrying a light elongated bullet with a heavy charge of powder behind it, fulfils all the conditions which seem to be indispensable. Probably a ·450 bore is the most convenient. If much larger in the gauge you get too heavy a weapon, especially when following a wounded deer uphill on a hot day, and the bullet makes an unnecessarily large wound. On the other hand, a rifle with too small a bore is naturally not so effective in stopping a stag as one of larger dimensions.

But the great thing is to get a rifle made by a good maker, to try it well before going out, and when out to hold it straight.

As regards the bullet, it should, if intended to go up quickly, be hollowed out more or less. A hollow bullet is objectionable. It splinters in the body of the deer like a shell, and makes a mess of the venison. A tapered form is the best—that is, one with a small cavity which should be filled with plaster of Paris, but on no account with copper. Hammerless weapons are of more advantage in the case of rifles than of guns. I venture to say that there will be no deer-stalker who reads these pages who cannot remember some occasion when he had to pull his rifle out of its cover in a hurry and found the hammers catch in the moleskin or canvas material of which it was made. Accidents, too, have occurred when the rifle has been thrust into its case carelessly without taking the precaution of putting on the stops, the catching above alluded to bringing the hammer from half to full cock.

Let us now deal with stalking in its more serious aspects. To find in the first place, then to circumvent, and lastly to get within shot of an animal so shy and wary as a red deer in its wild state, endowed as he is with powers of sight, scent, and hearing to a degree rarely equalled and never excelled by any other

species, requires both the aptitude which is almost an instinct, and knowledge which can be only acquired by long practice. Hence it is beyond question that it is not advisable for the 'gentleman' to attempt to do his own stalking. There is no reason why the owner of the forest, if it pleases him to do so, should not go out alone, though then I suspect that in such cases the only change from the orthodox method is, that the man who carries the rifle is called a gillie, and walks behind instead of in front of his 'gentleman.' I have tried stalking for myself, and in spite of knowing my own ground thoroughly and having specially good eyesight, experience leads me to prefer the usual method. I am not ashamed to confess that I like the presence of my stalker for the sake of his company. To spend the whole day on the hill, to witness the various incidents of the sport or the phenomena of nature without anyone to share the interest involved in all that goes on, deprives me of half the enjoyment. True you have the gillie, but he is probably young and shy, and cannot be got to talk, while his conversation would likely not be interesting. Your stalker, on the other hand, is often more amusing than a professional dining-out wit, while his descriptions of the performances of the last few days since you saw him cannot fail, even though

not told in racy language or interspersed with anecdotes, to command the attention of his employer.

Then I used to find that, when stalking for myself, I lost too much time. It is impossible for any amateur to make good his ground as easily or as quickly as one who by long practice has acquired the necessary confidence in himself. When you have found deer and made up your mind how they are to be approached, the chief point which should occupy the stalker's attention is to take his marks—that is, to make a note of any prominent features of the ground which he has to traverse, and the nearer such marks are to the place where the deer are lying, the more important do they become. Now in most cases the appearance of these marks, which are generally stones, is very different when you get close to them from what was presented to you when looking at them through the glass ; and if, as is often necessary, you crawl up to them from the other side, they are simply unrecognisable. In such a position the amateur is helpless. He gets no consolation from the gillie, as he was too proud to confide in him when he first spied the deer. The forester knows exactly when to come down on to his marks, and to hit off the exact spot where it is safe to leave the ridge and seek the shelter of the 'knobby' or boulder stone from which he expects to get the

shot. I will not do the amateur the injustice to say that he is likely to make a mess of it, but my own experience in stalking is that on such occasions there is a good deal of time lost in walking along the ridge or crawling up and down in search of the said boulder, accompanied by mental ejaculations respecting the ultimate fate of this inanimate object which it is not here necessary to repeat.

A minor evil which I used to find when stalking myself, was a sense of discomfort caused by the strained position of the neck when walking uphill, as you are obliged to be constantly on the look-out on opening fresh ground, when at any moment a hind and calf, or a small stag, might jump up and spoil the stalk.

These considerations apply to the owner of a forest attempting to dispense with the services of a stalker. It will be readily understood that, in the case of a guest, the practice is quite inadmissible. There is no objection to anyone, owner or guest, doing for himself the last few yards of the stalk. *If he can be trusted*, it is far better and safer that he should do so. If he cannot be trusted, it is wiser and safer to leave it to the professional.

The consideration which is paramount in deer-stalking operations is the direction of the wind,

and the first question asked by the sportsman who is to go on the hill on any given morning is 'How is the wind?' No matter where his beat is situated, it may be far or near, he has to study the clouds, or ascertain otherwise from which point operations should begin. It is needless to observe that, *as a rule*, the party should proceed to that end of their beat which is to leeward and work up wind. Of course in each individual stalk this is an absolute rule, and admits of no exception, though for the last few hundred yards a side wind will do, and is indeed often unavoidable. Dealing with the beat, however, rather than the stalk, there are important variations depending on the position of the forest in respect to marches, and special circumstances affecting each beat.

Suppose the ground to be worked consists of one side of a long glen, containing three or four large corries separated by shoulders and ascending with a gradually steepening gradient to a ridge of 2,000 or 2,500 feet above sea-level. For the sake of simplifying the illustration, we will say the glen runs east and west, and the wind is from the west. It might be thought natural that the stalking party should begin at the east end. But let us see what the effect of this would be. They disturb the first corrie, and move the deer over the shoulder into the next one.

This may be full of deer, or it may contain none. If the former, it is more than likely that the two lots—those that it originally contained and the new comers, whose sudden arrival must cause a certain commotion—will move on to the third corrie. If the second corrie is empty, those that have been moved into it may remain there or they may go on still further up wind. Our party follows them over the shoulder till a view is obtained of the whole or most of the corrie. If deer are spied, it will probably be necessary to go to the top of the ridge in order to get at them by crawling down the burn, or to take advantage of whatever irregularities the ground may afford. It will be hardly possible to get a chance by going through the corrie, as the top of the shoulder will be in full view of its leeward side, where the herd, if they have remained there at all, are likely to be found. If nothing is espied from the shoulder, the stalkers must in any case ascend the ridge to get a proper view of the third corrie. They have now cleared half the ground of deer and driven them all towards the west or farthest end of the beat; and at the end of the day, unless the sport has been very successful, or for some other special reason it is brought to an abrupt conclusion, there will not be a stag left in the whole of that beat. Now it is not to be supposed that the tactics

described above would be adopted if the west end of this beat marched with a neighbouring forest. Why, therefore, should such a course be followed even when there is little chance of the owner of the forest losing the deer altogether?

The proper way of proceeding in the case I have imagined is to begin with the west corrie. You, of course, clear that and send any deer which may be on it off the ground, but they won't disturb you for the rest of the day. If you have luck and get a stag, then it may be proper to get hold of the ridge and make for the farthest or east corrie, leaving the middle of your beat untouched. In that case the deer disturbed in the east end may move on to the ground where no one has been, or at worst go as far as the corrie where you got the stag in the morning; and in this way the beat will not be left absolutely empty of deer. To the objection that the course suggested would involve a lot of walking, my answer is that it would seem to be so *on paper*, but it is not so in reality. There are, of course, exceptions, but as a rule walking on a ridge such as is here imagined is not only easy, but the distances from the top of one corrie to the top of another are often surprisingly short. They spread out like a fan, the handle representing the top of the corrie, which unlike the fan is

concave instead of flat. There is thus an enormous amount both of walking and climbing to be done when dealing with these formations among the hills, while on the ridge there is nothing to speak of. As regards the climb from shoulder to ridge, that must be faced in whichever of the two ways the ground is worked.

It is, of course, impossible to give illustrations of the proper manner in which all kinds of ground should be worked. Local knowledge and experience must decide what is best. But local experience may occasionally err and become tainted with prejudice or by jealousy. I cannot help thinking that the wind is sometimes blamed when the fault really lies in an exaggerated fear on the part of the owner or his forester lest the neighbour may benefit by sending friends out in the forest when 'she is in the wrong airt.' Great caution in this respect is of course praiseworthy, but I have a suspicion that it is sometimes overdone, and at any rate I have many a time felt for the sorrows of friends who have come to me from other forests with woeful tales of 'wind all wrong the whole time I was at such and such a place' —'never had my rifle out of its case'—'hope the wind is not equally bad with you,' &c. It was always a pleasure to be able to assure him that, be the wind

what it might, we would try to get him a shot somehow.

On the other hand, the friend when he goes out should endeavour to think of others besides himself and his own sport, and should not try to bully or cajole the stalker into allowing him to spoil the chances of the man who was to go out next day. Almost the only scoldings I have ever had to give my servants were for allowing themselves to be persuaded by the 'gentleman' into doing what they knew was wrong. The youngest of these men has been in my service twenty-five years, and they are all well trained by this time if a story is true (which I greatly doubt) that was told me with great glee by a friend who had tried his best to get the stalker to allow him to go after a good beast which they had spied on ground off his beat. The man replied that it was as much as his life was worth. 'You mean as much as your place was worth,' said my friend. 'Not at all,' he rejoined, 'I well believe Lochiel would shoot me if I were to take you on to that hill, as he intends stalking there himself to-morrow.' I was not conscious of deserving a character so ferocious, but I did not soon hear the last of the incident.

Much more ground is got over in a day at the present time than was the case formerly, owing to the

numerous bridle-paths which have been constructed, and which enable the sportsman to ride with ease up to the tops of hills to attain which cost him formerly a long and weary climb. This advantage may to some extent and in some instances be neutralised by a departure from the habit of early rising, which is not of course so necessary with the altered conditions of locomotion, and also, where deer are more plentiful than they used to be, by the less time occupied in searching the ground and in the course of the day going over a much larger area. These paths if judiciously planned are of great benefit, and may be appreciated even by those who scorn 'luxurious ease' as affording the means of bringing home your stag the same night, which might not be easy without them.

Deer ought never to be left out all night on the hill when it is possible to get the carcase home. It is idle to say that the venison does not suffer. Perhaps when the atmosphere is very dry without frost not much harm is done, but a wet night or a white frost is fatal to a haunch which is to be sent to a friend, while it won't keep more than a day or two even in your own larder.

Before leaving the subject of wind it may be interesting to remark that, while the keen sense of scent possessed by red deer sorely handicaps the

stalker in his attempt to approach a stag, yet the latter occasionally also suffers from the same cause. It must have happened to most of those of my readers who have enjoyed the sport which we are discussing to scent deer themselves. I have not infrequently got a shot unexpectedly when coming suddenly on fresh ground by observing the attitude of the dog that is trotting by my side or being led by the gillie behind. He will put up his head and sniff the air in an unmistakable way. Then the rifle may be pulled out of its case, and everything got ready for a snap shot should a stag jump up in front of the party of stalkers out of some hole in the bog where he was quite concealed from view. As mentioned above, it is not always the dog that puts you on the alert. The smell of deer, especially at the end of the season, is so strong that their presence can be detected by the unaided and limited sense of smell possessed by the owner of the dog.

The mention of this leads to the consideration of what is a very important branch of the science of deer-stalking, Ought dogs to be used in a forest at all? if so, What is the best kind of dog? If not, How are you to get a wounded deer? My answer to the latter question is that on favourable ground you might expect to get two out of three, while on unfavourable ground,

GETTING ON THE DEER

where the hills are steep, the corries small, or where woods abound, hardly any would be recovered. A stag shot in the body may lie down, and if the nature of the ground will allow of his being watched, the stalker may see where he goes; and then it is *generally* easy enough to get up to and finish him. Even this is not always possible. Over and over again I have known a stag cross the burn below where he was fired at and lie down on the face of the hill exactly opposite to where we remained watching him, the distance in a straight line between pursuer and pursued being so short that the movements of the latter could be observed with the naked eye. On these occasions the moment we tried to get out of the place the beast saw us and was up and off and soon out of sight, having a good start of perhaps half an hour before we could get to the top of the opposite ridge. On these occasions either the dog was left some way behind, or there were special reasons why it was injudicious to slip him.

But if a stag, instead of being shot through the body, has merely a broken leg, he is not nearly so ready to lie down, but tries to keep with the herd, which often accommodate their pace to that of their wounded comrade. Even if a solitary stag, it is difficult to see how he is to be stopped without a dog.

The fastest runner in Scotland cannot catch him—the ground soon takes him out of sight—he seeks some well-known shelter, or else goes straight on end, regardless of the disturbance to other deer, and ignoring the arrangements of beats or of marches. To follow him on foot, as you catch a glimpse of him from one skyline to another, would be the height of folly. The place would be spoilt for stalking for some days to come, and the end after all would not be attained. And yet! The only valid objection that is raised against the use of dogs in a forest is that it causes such disturbance to the ground! Why, a dog that had never seen a deer, borrowed for the day from the neighbouring shepherd, would soon put a three-legged stag, if alone, into the nearest burn and enable you to do *something* to secure him, so whatever disturbance there might be would be confined to quite a limited extent of ground.

It will be seen that I have no hesitation how to answer the question, Should dogs be used in a forest? Let us therefore consider what is the best kind of dog for the purpose. First, as regards deerhounds. No one has a greater admiration for this magnificent breed than I have. I used to employ them for stalking purposes during many years, and they added a charm to the enjoyment of that form of sport which it would

be ungrateful to deny. The beauty, gentleness, strength and speed of pure-bred deerhounds make them not only delightful companions, but trusty allies on the hill, where the power of scent is not required. Strongly biassed as I have always been in favour of these magnificent dogs, truth compels me to admit that for the pursuit of wounded deer they are not the most suitable. They are so high-couraged that it is impossible to submit them to any course of training, while it is not in their nature to put their nose to the ground. Thus it was always necessary to take out two dogs, viz. a deerhound to slip at the wounded stag, and a tracker of some kind to follow on a leash. The former would generally pull down his quarry and then return to his master; occasionally he would lie down beside the dead stag and remain for some time, but in a wood or in a burn with steep banks, this, of course, did not help matters, as it was impossible to find either dog or deer. A few, very few, could be got to stand bay till the stalking party, guided by the deep note of the hound, came to the place and relieved him from further responsibility. So that first there was the chance of the dog seizing the deer by the throat and killing him; next, in case the latter was strong enough and able to find some deep burn or overhanging rock so loved by artists who attempt

to portray these exciting scenes, there was the chance of the dog breaking bay as soon as he found that it was not possible to get his enemy by the throat; and, lastly, there was the chance, not confined to deer-hounds, of the stalkers failing to find the stag or to hear the far-off challenge of the hound.

Another difficulty which has to be faced if deer-hounds are employed lies in the impossibility of training them to the work. This also applies, but in a less degree, to any kind of dog intended to be slipped —not run on a string. A good keeper will break a brace of young pointers or setters so perfectly before the 12th of August that they only require a shot or two to be fired over them to render their performance on the moor equal to that of seasoned dogs. This cannot be done with deerhounds. It is only practice in the stalking season that gives these dogs an opportunity of learning the business, and showing of what stuff they are made. While their education therefore is going on, many a good stag may be lost. There is no use training them on wounded hinds during winter. These have no horns, and the hound never gets the chance of a 'bay.'

Another objection to using deerhounds lies in the necessity, before alluded to, of taking out two dogs, one for tracking, instead of only one. I often

found deerhounds given to whine when in presence of deer, but that is a minor fault.

On the whole, and without going into the relative merits of other breeds of dogs, such as retrievers, harchers, or even terriers, many of which are excellent trackers, I have come to the conclusion that nothing beats a collie for general use on the hill. He is possessed of instinct, one may almost call it sense, in a higher degree than any other breed, and he is more tractable—he will run by sight or by scent, loose or on a cord—he will keep close to his master, requiring no gillie to lead him—he can be taught to lie down, and will even learn to crawl when necessary, at any rate his motions are those of an animal who knows that he is trying to approach his prey unobserved. But the chief merit in a collie over all other dogs for following a wounded deer consists in his wonderful faculty for distinguishing between the track of a wounded and that of a cold stag. This gift comes only by practice, and perfection in this respect must not be expected in a dog under three or four years old. As speed is an essential quality, and this begins to fail after a dog is six or seven years of age, it will be seen that the life of a collie *at his best* is but short.

I have had in my possession (or rather, my stalkers

have had) some extraordinarily 'wise' collies, and I cannot here refrain from giving one instance of the sagacity of a small yellow bitch called Lassie, whose progeny I am glad to say are still flourishing in the glen, though none of them have as yet equalled the fame of their ancestress.

I was out at the far-off end of the forest, and, getting a shot at a stag almost in the gloaming, wounded it in the forearm. The deer had not seen me, and as only one shot had been fired and it was nearly dusk, they were not much alarmed. They ran straight down the hill about 150 yards, crossed the burn, ran about the same distance up the other side, and then stopped, turned round and stared back at us. The distance across was quite short, the banks of the burn being steep, and we were just able to distinguish the wounded deer, having observed him limping behind the others before they came to a standstill. What were we to do? It was impossible to move—the deer would have picked us up at once and been off. There was no time to follow them, and there was a dense fir wood with high heather only half a mile away. 'Shall I slip Lassie?' said the stalker. 'Surely not at a herd of deer!' I exclaimed; 'she will probably go after a calf or something and disturb the whole forest.' 'Well, as you think right,'

he replied, 'but I have great confidence in the bitch, and besides she will soon overtake the herd, and the lame one is likely to be the last, and therefore the first which Lassie will come up to.' This last argument decided me. 'Let her go,' I whispered, and off she went. So quick were her movements, that the herd had not started when she was close upon them. Then they broke up into two lots, and off they went at a great pace. Would Lassie take the lot in which was our wounded stag? No! she goes after the others, and our hearts sink within us. But only for an instant—quick as thought she finds out that our stag is not in front of her, so she gallops back to where they were standing, takes up the track of the other parcel, and away she goes again in hot pursuit. She gets close to them—a real fast dog will always beat a deer up hill—they again split up, the wounded stag and one other going to the right, the remainder straight on up the hill. 'We are done this time,' I exclaimed, as the bitch went as hard as she could after the herd. The words were hardly out of my mouth when she again turned back, took up the track of our wounded beast, came up with him, turned him down to the burn, and in less than a minute afterwards we had him with a shot through his head. This was a splendid performance.

As a rule, and unless your dog is exceptionally good, it is not advisable to slip him until the wounded beast has separated from his companions; even then it may save trouble if you allow the dog to follow the track on the cord for a bit. He may be loosed when a ridge is reached, or some spot which commands a wide view. This is the more to be recommended, as slipping the dog often means that the slipper must prepare for a run as well, and if the former gets a long start up hill it may be difficult to follow him, for the dog gets over the ridge long before the panting gillie is half-way up, and when there he may not know which way to go.

It is sometimes difficult to know where a stag is hit. When a bone is broken the beast of course shows it. If hit in the body he generally sickens and lies down. If touched at the base of the horn, the back of the skull, or the top of the shoulder, he often drops to the shot but gets up, shakes himself, and is off as strong as ever. It is not wise to take for granted, because you see blood, that a deer is badly wounded. A flesh wound in the shoulder or haunch often causes an amount of bleeding that leads the inexperienced sportsman to believe the wound is severe, and to insist on the dog being loosed. The wary forester ought to resist any such invitation, if he is careful of

his employer's interests. It ought not to be difficult in such a dilemma to judge of the nature of the wound. There is first the observation of the stalker when the shot is fired, as to the effect upon the deer; then comes the position in which the stag was when hit; lastly, his movements afterwards. If the wound be only a skiff, no difference is observed in the carriage of the animal from that of his companions. He does not sicken or poke his head forwards, or show any of the symptoms of being shot in the body. His head is carried as erect, his action is as free as if nothing had happened, and the only observable difference between his conduct and that of the herd is a strong and not unnatural inclination to put as long a distance as possible between himself and his pursuers. In other words, a slightly wounded stag often leads, a badly wounded stag always follows the rest.

Sometimes, however, it is more difficult to determine where a stag is hit. I would give a good deal to be able to ascertain in what part of the body I wounded a stag, a few years ago, that I never found. The story is remarkable, so I will tell it just as it happened. I fired at a stag standing on the ridge of a 'knowe' and surrounded by other deer. It was a long way from home, and getting late in the day. We heard the thud of the bullet, and I made no doubt we should

realise our beast on going over the hillock on which he was standing. On reaching the spot he was not to be seen anywhere, so we at once took a spy at the rest of the herd, who had by this time got well up the opposite hill. Our friend was not among them, but we soon discovered him half-way between us and them. He was looking very unhappy, his head was stretched out, and he seemed to pay no attention to anything, but walked very slowly and dejectedly after his companions. So bad did he appear that my stalker wanted to slip the dog at once, but I would not allow this, as it seemed as if the other deer would soon be out of sight, and we could follow the wounded one with greater safety. However, they did not seem to be much frightened, and he went walking slowly on, until at last, to my intense disgust, they got together and stood on the ridge, some of them actually beginning to feed. I thought it was all up, and prepared to go home, as it was not Lassie that was out with me that day, but a young brindled collie, very strong and very fast, but not fit to be slipped at a parcel of deer a quarter of a mile off. Just as we were preparing to leave, the deer suddenly threw up their heads, looked about them for a minute, and then galloped off down to a burn running at an angle to the main stream, which they crossed, went over the

other ridge, and were out of sight in five minutes. Now was our time, for the wounded stag was left alone in front of us. He never attempted to follow after the rest, but walked slowly forward in the direction in which he had been going. As soon as he was out of sight I sent the stalker after him with the dog, and knowing that the latter getting so close at the start must turn him down hill to the burn, walked in that direction with the intention of finishing him as soon as he was brought to bay. Unfortunately, I did not guess that the first part of the operation would be so soon over, and I had not quite got within shot of the burn, when the deer appeared on the skyline, a little to the right of where he had disappeared from view, and came best pace down the bank followed by the collie twenty yards behind. No sign of any wound now! He galloped with long, firm strides, and head erect just as well as any other stag in the forest. It was simply amazing to see him move at such a pace; but as he had a long way to go before reaching the rough fir and heather which skirts the shore of the loch, I still hoped we should get him, especially as his course would take him within fifty yards of a big boulder, where the gillie and deer pony were always left when we were out on that beat. There was, however, nothing for it but to run as hard as we could after

them. The glen from that point to the loch is about five miles, and the gillie was stationed two miles from where we started. When we arrived at the boulder and asked eagerly whether the chase had swept by, we were informed that the deer and dog had passed about twenty minutes before our arrival, the stag going as hard and fresh as ever, and the dog still twenty yard behind. Onwards we went too, though certainly neither as fast nor as fresh as before. We easily followed the tracks till within half a mile of the loch where the wood begins. Here the deer must have plunged into the thicket, like his kinsman in the 'Lady of the Lake,' and was lost in its deep recesses. The dog was heard to bay him somewhere near the shore; but it was pitch dark when we arrived at the pier, and we only learnt this from the lad who met us there. The dog went straight home during the night.

As one of the most remarkable illustrations of the proverb that 'misfortunes never come alone' that I ever experienced, I may be permitted to give the conclusion of this adventure. The point at which we touched the loch is about ten miles from the Castle, and we always use a steam launch to take us home from that beat. On the occasion referred to no launch was there, but only the small boat belonging to her, and we were informed by the

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lad in charge that the steamer had broken down and could not come to the usual place. So we had to make the best of it and row all the way in the small boat. It was blowing pretty fresh, but not really hard, and the direction was favourable. But alas! the oars were old and only suited for paddling from the launch to the shore. One of them broke in two before we had been five minutes on board, and we were left drifting about at the wrong end of our lake. After much difficulty we succeeded in paddling across to the other side, using one oar and the seat of the boat, there being no road on the side on which we embarked. I then started on a ten-mile walk, on a roughish track, in a pitch-dark night, through thick woods the whole way. Tired as I was, it was with a sense of no small relief that on reaching a keeper's house, within three miles of home, I got hold of an old pony and still older saddle, and, having mounted, thought to reach the Castle comfortably if not triumphantly. Vanity of vanities! Scarce half a mile of the remainder of the journey was accomplished when my pony shied at a sheep that started from the roadside, swerved, and down I came saddle and all. The girths had given way! My back was so bruised that I could not remount, though I had little inclination for that mode of progression

after such an experience, so I limped as best I could for the remainder of the distance, and reached home at midnight.

A few days after this chapter of accidents I happened to read an account of some anti-deer forest meeting, when deer-stalking was described as being at the present day an effeminate kind of sport; no exertion was required, no adventures were to be met with; it was altogether different from what it used to be, and consisted in sitting in an armchair and having half-tame deer driven past. I wished the gentleman who made those remarks had been seated on my old white pony, when the sheep started him, instead of myself. After such a day he would have found mother earth a very uncomfortable armchair.

I hardly like to close this chapter without giving a few hints and suggestions on the actual shooting of deer, though it should be clearly understood that they are entirely the results of my own experience, that it is not intended to dogmatise or lay down absolute rules which must necessarily be followed, and that the remarks which are here made must be taken for what they are worth, and no more.

Often have I known a man come from the hill

with a woe-begone countenance and the admission that he had missed two good chances. 'And yet,' he would add, 'I tried a shot before starting, and hit a bottle at a hundred yards.' That is just it. Shooting at a bottle is very different from shooting at a stag. If everyone who can hit a mark even a foot square at a hundred yards was equally successful at deer there would be no missing in the forest, for those who could not accomplish that feat would probably not attempt stalking.

Coolness is the great desideratum in firing at a stag. This quality is generally supposed to be acquired by practice. It is not always so. I have known men, who never were and never will be even fair shots, and who are so fond of the sport that they go on year after year with very varying success. On the other hand, two of the steadiest shots that ever came to this forest were men who began to stalk comparatively late in life, and who never got any practice at deer in other places.

For my own part, I am no believer in practising with a rifle at a mark after your weapon has been well tried. It may do no harm, but it certainly does no good. If coolness is the quality most required, what can the young shooter learn by blazing away at a bottle? We have all heard of stag fever, but who

has ever heard of bottle fever? (except in a sense outside the scope of this work). Snapping caps, or unloaded cartridges, is much better practice than firing at a mark. One great fault in shooting at deer is the notion that, when you have taken careful aim, all you have to do is to pull the trigger. But there are different ways of pulling the trigger. There is no use talking of a gentle gradual pull or squeeze, in the language of the army musketry instructor. The pull of the weapon used in the army is very different from that of a sporting rifle. And yet there should be no jerk. I found the safest corrective against this fault was to try to get hold of the idea, and when got hold of to retain it, that the operation of firing was not concluded when the trigger was pulled, and that the eye should be kept fixed on the foresight until time is allowed for the crack of the bullet to reach the ear. This is done in an instinctive way when firing at a long range—say 150 yards; why should it not be done when the object is half that distance? As a matter of fact, the closer the deer is the greater is the tendency to jerk the trigger. Now nothing teaches the beginner to keep his eyes open and pull without the objectionable jerk better than practising with blank cartridge. If he must fire ball at something, and cannot get the chance of hinds in winter, let him

go to some safe place on a hill and fire at stones from every kind of position.

One rule in shooting deer is so well known that it is hardly necessary to mention it. The rifle should never rest on a rock or hard substance. If it does, the jar will send the bullet far over the object aimed at. But this applies, in a less degree, when the elbows are resting on a hard substance, as the jar, though diminished in force, still communicates itself through the arms to the rifle. It is generally easy to get a bit of soft turf to place under the rifle, or a pocket-handkerchief stuffed into your cap will do as well.

On no account should a running shot be taken from a rest, or from any position except from the shoulder, standing if possible. Even the ordinary elbow-on-knee position is not admissible. The arms must be free to follow the deer, or it is a miss in nine cases out of ten.

With regard to running shots, the fuss that is made about them has often surprised me. How constantly it happens that a sportsman returning from the hill on being asked by his host 'What luck?' replies 'None at all'! 'What, did you not get a shot?' 'Only a running one; no chance at all.' Now there are running shots and running shots. To my mind a stag cantering broadside at seventy yards is far

easier to hit than one which is lying down where the shooter is in a cramped position ; and I cannot help thinking that better results would follow if stalkers would have greater confidence in themselves, and not sacrifice time and run many other risks, such as a change of wind, the arrival of other deer, and accidents of all kinds, in order to make sure of a pot-shot.

Here is an example. Suppose you find yourself within sixty yards of a stag that is lying down, not above him, but on flattish ground, with a small hollow intervening. His head is turned towards you or sideways. With the greatest difficulty you are able to bring your eyes to the level of the mound in front in order to see him. To show more than the peak of your cap is impossible ; to get the rifle on the mound out of the question—what is to be done? If the stag is a real good one, it may be well to wait for him to get up, then take the opportunity of getting the rifle over the ridge when his head is turned away, and fire as soon as he presents a broadside shot. Even then he may move off, tail on, and a fresh stalk may be unavoidable. But if only a moderate beast, and it is early in the day, by waiting you may lose the best part of it and after all not get a shot. Under these circumstances I should have no hesitation what

to do. Crawl back a yard or two till you can just see the deer when on your legs, and not quite at your full height. Put the rifle to your shoulder and raise yourself slowly till you get the bead on him. Now he will either stare at you long enough to get a sitting shot, or he will jump up and stand for two or three seconds, in which case you ought to make sure of him, or, what is most likely, the stag will bolt off at once. He may give you a running broadside, and if so his fate should be sealed, or he may gallop straight away end on. Now you must shoot at his neck. This sounds a poor chance, but consider that first of all the ground is, in the case supposed, fairly level—otherwise the stalker might get above him and there would be no difficulty in obtaining a shot; next, that a stag runs with head erect, and that the target presented is not after all a very bad one. If hit anywhere from the top of the skull to the top of the shoulder he will drop, and, if only stunned, by running in quickly you can get so near as to finish him to a certainty with the second barrel. If the bullet misses him altogether, the whistle of it close past his head may not improbably turn him, and a broadside shot with the second barrel may bring him down. If he continues on his course, it is advisable to exercise some self-restraint and not fire again, as he

is by that time rather too far off for a neck shot and you run the risk of haunching him.

Two other suggestions may appropriately close these remarks. Do not fire very long shots. The effect is likely to be that you wound the deer, and still more likely that you miss him. In either case the stalker will come home happier if he had not fired a shot. Lastly, when a stag drops to the shot instantaneously, he is probably hit on the top of the neck or shoulder and only stunned. It is then advisable to shove in another cartridge and get up to him with the least possible delay. As soon as he moves, sit down, taking a rest off your knees; keep quite cool, and fire as soon as a good chance is offered. If the ground be steep and the distance reasonable, it may be well to make ready from the place where you originally got the shot rather than risk an uncomfortable position for the gain of only a few yards. But all these matters must be determined by considerations which must be dealt with on the spot, and can only be discussed in a general way in a treatise on stalking.

CHAPTER IV

DEER FORESTS: THEIR SOCIAL AND ECONOMICAL ASPECTS

In view of the long and heated controversy which has raged between the advocates and opponents of the system of converting large areas of pasture land into deer forests, it seems not only proper but almost essential that in a treatise like the present one some reference should be made to the preservation of deer from an economical aspect. To deal comprehensively with this branch of the subject, bringing out all that has ever been said for and against the system, analysing the evidence and going minutely into facts and figures, would alone fill a volume of the 'Fur and Feather' series, and is here out of the question.

I propose, in the following pages, to deal briefly with—first, the origin of the attacks made on deer forests, and the various quarters whence such attacks have proceeded; secondly, the judgment pronounced on them after hearing evidence on both sides by

responsible members of Royal Commissions or Parliamentary Committees; and, thirdly, the possibility of remedying the grievances of any class of the community which may still exist as against owners and occupiers of forests.

It is no use denying that there has prevailed for very many years a popular feeling, based largely on sentiment, hostile to the enlargement of the area devoted to deer, if not to their preservation even on ground where they have been established from a remote antiquity. An idea was entertained, which is not lightly to be contemned, that in a thickly populated country it was not desirable to restrict the land which was available for the production of beef and mutton in order to turn it into a game preserve; while there were vague notions floating about that whole regions had been depopulated in order to secure their undisturbed occupation by wild animals.

Thus, whenever any practical objection to deer forests was started by any class of persons whose interests were involved, these had no difficulty in obtaining a share of popular support by no means commensurate with the importance of those interests or the numerical strength of their representatives.

The first to take the field against deer and deer forests were the large sheep-farmers. That they had

grievances is beyond doubt. I am personally only too well aware of the fact, as at the time I incurred a considerable amount of unpopularity (unjustly as I thought then and still think) from having, as was alleged, taken up a hostile attitude on the question towards a large and at that time an influential section of the constituency which I represented in Parliament.

Well do I remember the year 1880, when I nearly lost my seat. I had to go about the country making speeches on Afghanistan and Zululand, defending the policy of the Government, and expressing views—which perhaps I have since seen reason to modify—while all the time I felt it was not so much the aggressive attitude of my political chiefs in far-away regions that provoked a certain hostility towards myself, as the aggressive attitude which I was supposed to have assumed on the subject of deer forests. And yet I was completely misunderstood. That sheep-farmers had reason to complain of injury inflicted on them arising out of the proximity and development of deer forests no one, myself least of all, could deny. The question was, whether if one class of the community made less profit in the business in which they were engaged, owing to the existence of a new and in a way competitive industry in the same district, it was

proper or expedient to put an end to the latter for the benefit of the former by legislative enactment. In a free country, and especially in a country where free trade is established, such a proposition would appear to be inadmissible. If it could be entertained for a moment, a much stronger case has since arisen, where the principle might, on grounds of national as well as private interests, be more appropriately applied. At the present time, owing to the low price of corn, more and more arable land is being converted into pasture, with the result that agricultural labour is less required, and those who used to earn a living in connection with the raising of crops are being gradually driven into the towns; and thus our rural population is steadily decreasing. A comparison of the two cases is striking. In the first you have the grazing of deer substituted for the grazing of sheep; in the latter, the grazing of sheep or cattle for the raising of crops. So far the similarity holds good. But it goes no further. Whether we regard the number of those whose interests are adversely affected, or the importance of those interests from a national point of view as regards the well-being of a large portion of our population, or in respect of our food supplies, it seems placed beyond the region of doubt that if it is desirable to interfere by special legislation with the

free development of industries, as these may spring up in consequence of new trade requirements or economic changes, at least we should begin by attacking the greater and more serious evil. And yet no one so far has proposed to pass a law to compel farmers to plough their land or even to abstain from continuing the process of converting arable into pasture.

In the days of which I am now speaking there were—besides those which still remain, with which I will deal presently—two main grievances on the part of farmers against owners of deer forests. The first was what will be easily imagined—viz. the incursion of deer from adjoining forests on to the sheep grazings. It was alleged that much of the sweet grass on the tops of the hills was consumed by deer in summer, and that they also poached on the lower grounds in winter, to the detriment of the legitimate stock. That such was the case on certain farms I know for a fact; but I hardly think that at any time the evil extended over a large area, and at the present day it must be still further limited, seeing that most of those farms which proved so attractive to deer have been handed over for their legitimate use, so that they can no longer be said to 'poach.' It must also be remembered that it was always in the power of the shepherd, when going his

rounds, to clear every deer off his hirsel without much effort.

The other objection (it can hardly be called a grievance) made by farmers to the increased number of deer forests could not be gainsaid. It will be understood easily enough that the high summer grazings which were best adapted to hold stags of good quality and in large numbers during the shooting season were not, as a rule, suited for a breeding stock of sheep. They constituted what is technically known as 'wedder' ground. Now, this ground used to be stocked by lambs bred sometimes by the same farmer, often by other farmers who occupied lands more fitted for breeding ewes. In such cases the latter found a ready market perhaps close at hand for his wedder lambs. But when these high-lying grazings were converted into deer forests the man who used to supply the wedder lambs lost his market, and for some years there was a difficulty in finding a new one.

But these matters, regulated by economical laws, never fail to right themselves. It was absurd to suppose that if a man took the trouble to breed so dainty an article of consumption as a sheep of the mountain black-faced breed, he would not be able to find a customer. The farmer lost one customer, but he soon found another and a better. The consumer of mutton has now dis-

covered two facts (may not our overmuch-abused deer forests get some of the credit?)—first, that it is not necessary to keep black-faced sheep till they are four years old, but that they can be 'forced' just as well as the larger and heavier breeds and killed at eighteen months old; secondly, that when thus treated they are as far superior to a Lincoln or Leicester year-old hogg as a well-fed ox is to an aged cow. My readers must not, however, misunderstand me. I do not for a moment pretend that young black-faced mutton is in respect of colour or flavour or gravy as good as old; but I do maintain that it is better than young mutton of the coarser breeds, and has proved to be popular from its not being necessary to hang the meat so long before using it—an important consideration in many a household.

The next attack on the system of deer forests was made on behalf of small tenants, or 'crofters' as they are called in the Highlands. Those will be dealt with when we come to consider—as I now propose to do—the reports of the various public bodies which have been appointed to investigate the subject.

Allusion has already been made at the beginning of these chapters to the Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1872-73 on the Game Laws. This Committee was composed of twenty-one members,

selected, as usual, from both political parties, and containing among their number gentlemen, some Conservative and some Liberal, who were specially interested in agriculture, and supposed to be more or less opposed to the practice of game-preserving.

Some of the witnesses showed extreme hostility towards deer forests, and in their eagerness to denounce everything connected with these institutions considerably overshot the mark, damaging instead of furthering their cause, as the following amusing incident will show.

I was examining one of these witnesses who had been urging the well-worn but now disproved argument, that the substitution of deer for sheep limited to an appreciable extent the food supply of the nation. Thinking I had him in a corner, I asked whether he would not admit that, at all events, venison was wholesome food, whether he would deny that it was consumed by some one or other, often by those who otherwise never tasted meat all the year round, and how the fact of its being given away instead of sold to the butcher made any difference so far as his theory was concerned? Mistaking, inadvertently or otherwise, the point of my question, the witness replied that sheep-farmers were also generous in this respect. 'What!' I rejoined, 'do you mean to say that sheep-farmers

give away as many legs of mutton as shooting tenants do haunches of venison?' 'Certainly I do,' replied the undaunted witness. I don't think I pursued the subject any further.

Another episode in connection with this Committee in which I also came off second best may amuse my readers. A well-known member of it, who represented a constituency in East Anglia, asked me one day in the lobby of the House of Commons to explain to him the process by which a new forest was made, as he had not quite understood it as given by one of the witnesses. I told him it was very simple—that all you had to do was to remove the sheep, and if there were any existing deer forests in the district, by careful nursing, the ground would get stocked in a few years from outside. 'Oh, I see,' he said. 'It is as if I took a farm in Norfolk and, instead of buying cattle and sheep, simply opened my gates and collared those of my neighbours.' I told him the cases were quite different—that the sheep and cattle to which he referred were private property, while deer were *feræ naturæ*, and belonged to no one in particular. 'I quite understand all about that,' he rejoined; 'but is it not a fact that practically deer are the property of the man on whose ground they are found—to this extent, that he and no one else has a right to shoot

them?' I replied that was so. 'Then,' he went on, 'it seems to me that the man who forms a new forest does actually, by a certain process, attract deer from his neighbour's ground to his own, and thus becomes the owner *de facto* of animals which were the day before the property of that neighbour.' I could only answer him by saying that the practice was universally recognised as legitimate, though no doubt sometimes annoying, and that I had never heard of any grievance being made of it.

The result of this inquiry by a Select Committee was a report, unanimously agreed to, completely exonerating deer forests from the charges brought against them. It narrates that these charges were twofold: first, that deer forests 'tended to the depopulation of the country;' secondly, 'that by the displacement of sheep to make way for deer they have diminished the food supply and raised the price of meat to the consumer.' The report goes on to say: 'Your Committee are of opinion that the evidence does not bear out either of these charges.'

To those who may have the patience to wade through the evidence on this subject which was brought before the Committee the result cannot be surprising. No feebler case was ever submitted to a tribunal of intelligent men. It broke down at every

point, and some of the allegations were so monstrous in their absurdity that it is difficult to believe that they were seriously entertained by those who made them. An instance of this has been already quoted, but here are some others. One witness gravely informed the Committee that the substitution of deer for sheep in certain districts of Scotland had the effect of raising the price of mutton to the extent of 3*d.* or 4*d.* a lb. It was shown to him during the course of his examination that this could not be the case, seeing that the source of supply from these converted sheep-farms was infinitesimal compared with that derived from the rest of Great Britain and from foreign countries ; but it never seemed to occur to this gentleman, who was himself a large sheep-farmer, that if he believed in his own story he was the last person who ought to have complained of a process which added 50 per cent. to his profits.

Another witness declared that he spent as a sheep-farmer, in wages and other ways, ten times as much money as a shooting tenant would do ; while a third wanted to credit a farm, not with the value of the wool as taken from the sheep's back, but with the finished article in the shape of cloth ; and, as regards the carcase, he was not content with the price paid by the feeder to the farmer, but insisted on taking as the

basis of his calculation what was paid by the butcher to the man who fattened the sheep in the South on cake and turnips.

The next public inquiry on the subject of deer forests was that by the Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands) in 1883, under the chairmanship of Lord Napier and Ettrick. I was also a member of this Commission. It was a fairly constituted body. Two of our number were owners of deer forests: one was a member of Parliament who had strong views on the popular or anti-deer forest side of the question. Our chairman had a perfectly open mind, with a disposition, natural to one who had been mixed up all his life with public affairs, towards yielding somewhat to public sentiment, so far as that could be done without injury to the public interest. The other two were Highlanders pure and simple, devoted to their country, proud of its traditions, interested in its past history and future welfare, and at least as familiar with its language as any other two gentlemen of equal position and culture.

The inquiry was, of course, not limited to deer forests, but the subject was continually cropping up during the course of our proceedings, and, recognising its importance, we decided to devote a special chapter in our report to its discussion. Here, again, as in the

case of the Parliamentary committee, the report was unanimous, and signed by the whole of the Commissioners.

On this occasion an important change took place in the attack on deer forests. The investigation undertaken by the Royal Commission was one which affected crofters, and it was this class and their friends who now took up the attitude assumed by sheep-farmers in the inquiry by the Select Committee above referred to. Greater difficulty was consequently experienced in sifting the evidence. The sheep-farmers examined by the Committee were a highly intelligent body of men, and certainly quite able to take care of themselves under cross-examination. Their case was so feeble that it collapsed, but they made the most they could of it. With the crofter witnesses it was different. These, from their imperfect acquaintance with the elementary rules of political economy, their want of knowledge on matters affecting Highland interests beyond those in their own immediate districts, their ignorance of the English language—an interpreter being frequently employed—and their disinclination to discuss the subject generally, made our task laborious, and—had we not been assisted by those who, though not crofters themselves, claimed to represent them—to some extent unsatisfactory.

For instance, a crofter complained of the destruction of his crops by deer. He wanted, naturally enough, to be protected somehow or other against this injury. Perhaps, when asked, he could not suggest a remedy, but said that was not his business, but was the duty of the Commissioners. Or, he did propose a remedy, and when it was pointed out to him that this might bring about results in places where no grievances existed which he had not anticipated, he did not seem to understand why this should make any difference.

Again, another crofter, who wanted an out-run in the summer for his young cattle, and seeing a fine-looking bit of grazing just opposite to his window which was not occupied—as he looked at the matter—for any profitable purpose, asked to get it detached from the forest of which it formed a part, and added to his own holding. He could not be made to see the difficulties which stood in the way of carrying out what to him appeared a very simple affair. All this was very natural, and it is impossible to blame these witnesses for taking a limited and personal view of the situation; but it laid on the Royal Commission a larger responsibility than was the lot of those who composed the select Parliamentary committee.

The Commissioners in their report on this branch

of the inquiry narrate the 'principal objections against deer forests' as follows :—

1. That they have been created to a great extent by the eviction or removal of the inhabitants, and have been the cause of depopulation.

2. That land now cleared for deer might be made available for profitable occupation by crofters.

3. That it might, at all events, be occupied by sheep-farmers, and that a great loss of mutton and wool to the nation might thus be avoided.

4. That in some places where deer forests are contiguous to arable land in the occupation of crofters damage is done to the crops of the latter by the deer.

5. That deer deteriorate the pasture.

6. That the temporary employment of gillies and others in connection with deer forests has a demoralising effect.

On these six points it is here unnecessary to refer to the report, except as to the first three. No. 4 is admitted. Measures should, of course, be adopted to protect crops against the incursions of deer. The vast majority of deer forests are not situated where there are any crops to destroy. Game of all kinds, including roe, hares, rabbits, grouse, blackgame, and pheasants, are more or less injurious to crops ; but it is not suggested that, because a Norfolk farmer has his corn

eaten by rabbits or trampled on by pheasants, a Devonshire landowner should be prohibited from preserving the latter or from forming a rabbit forest (*i.e.* warren).

No. 5 is a matter of opinion which has no bearing on the question, and No. 6 is nonsense.

As regards the other three points, it is only here possible to give the pith of what the Commissioners say by means of a short extract, but the whole chapter on 'Deer Forests and Game' is well worth reading.

They say, in respect of the first objection, that they only found during the course of the inquiry 'one clearly established case in evidence of the removal of crofters for the purpose of adding to an already existing forest.'

On the second point the report continues that 'it may be fairly stated that by far the larger portion of land devoted to deer is to be found at such altitudes, and consists so much of rock, heather, and moor as to be unsuitable for crofters, except as sheilings or summer grazings.'

Thirdly, they lay it down as 'abundantly evident that in view of the sheep in the United Kingdom—amounting to $27\frac{1}{2}$ millions—besides all the beef grown at home, and all the beef and mutton imported, both dead and alive, from abroad, the loss to the community is not only insignificant, but almost inappreci-

able.' They make a similar statement, which it is not necessary to quote, as regards wool.

Thus this second inquiry ended with a report, signed by all the members of the Commission, as completely exonerating deer forests from the charges brought against them as did that of the Select Committee of 1872–73.

It is right, however, to say that the Royal Commission did make a suggestion, in deference, it will be suspected, to public opinion rather than from any hope that a practical way could be found by which to carry it out. They proposed, but in very guarded, not to say hesitating terms, that the appropriation of land for the purposes of a deer forest might be limited to an altitude not less than 1,000 feet above sea level on the east side of Scotland, and on the western seaboard to a lower level than 1,000 feet. They do not say how much lower it should be in the latter case, while, in order to guard against practical difficulties which might arise, the Commissioners present as an alternative scheme the inspection by a Government officer, with a view to ascertain its adaptability for other uses, of all land which it is proposed to convert into a deer forest.

Taken together, it is impossible to conceive a more thorough or exhaustive inquiry than that under-

taken by the Select Committee and the Royal Commission into the subject under consideration. No class of the community who had any grievance, real or sentimental, against deer forests was denied a hearing, and in the case of the Napier Commission, it may be added, a sympathetic hearing; yet, after all was said and done, no member of either body could be found bold enough to say that the complaints made, whether on public or private grounds, were of a nature to justify interference on the part of the Legislature with the purpose for which owners of land in the Highlands deemed it best, under the economical conditions now prevailing, to appropriate the hill grazing on their estates.

A third Commission was appointed in 1892, but it arrived practically at the same result as the previous ones. In all three cases there has been no dissentient voice, no minority report. Surely the question as to the propriety of interfering with deer forests by legislative action may be now allowed to rest.

I have abstained in this chapter, for obvious reasons, from dealing closely with the various arguments for or against deer forests which have at different times been put forward. Those who wish to pursue the subject will find plenty of matter in the shape of

Blue-Book literature if they will consult the ponderous volumes of evidence appended to the reports to which I have drawn attention.

It will not be thought unbecoming, before closing this chapter, to point out in what respect the existing system still works disadvantageously to classes of the community which are not directly concerned in the preservation or pursuit of deer, and to make a few suggestions as to the way in which some causes of difference and sources of injury may be removed or mitigated.

It may be said at once that tenants, whether large or small, of grazings in the vicinity of forests are in reality the only class who are affected. I must decline to recognise tourists as having anything to say in the matter. These have no permanent interest in the Highlands. They come for fresh air and scenery, of which they can get plenty without injury to anyone. Ninety-nine out of every hundred of these persons are quite satisfied to ascend mountains the most beautiful and fascinating of which happen not to be in deer forests, where they can do no harm. The tourist who goes out of his way to spoil the enjoyment of someone else because he thinks he has got the right to do so must be a very surly sort of fellow. Fortunately the specimen is rare.

Now, a sheep-farmer in the vicinity of deer forests has two difficulties to contend with, neither of which, in my opinion, need exist.

The first is the depredation committed among his lambs by foxes where these are not destroyed by the owner or tenant of the forest. In some forests foxes are regularly trapped, shot, or 'dug out' in the spring, just as is practised on ordinary shootings or farms. In a few cases there exists an objection to waging war against them, based on insufficient grounds, if not on imperfect knowledge. In the great majority there is no wish on the part of the owner of the forest to preserve vermin of any kind; but his people take little or no trouble about it, knowing that their employer has no real interest in the matter; while they are well aware that watching a den all night on the top of a hill in the month of March, or even as late as April, when a bitter north-east wind is blowing, is hardly as comfortable a situation as their own fireside followed by bed.

Now, there is little use killing foxes on sheep-ground if there exists close by a sanctuary where they can bring up their young in safety, from which they issue 'on the prowl' every night when game is scarce in the larder, or when they wish to vary the *menu* with a hind-quarter of lamb. The damage done to lambs

by foxes where these are numerous is very great. Last year (1895) we had here a regular invasion of these four-footed robbers; not only did they carry off lambs, but before these were dropped one ancient miscreant killed a Cheviot ewe heavy in lamb on every alternate day for three weeks. The brute was too cunning to look at a trap, nor would he take poisoned bait. There was nothing for it but to organise a drive, placing the keepers on passes, and using shepherds as beaters. We got him on the second attempt, and a rare specimen he was, measuring five feet from the tip of his nose to the end of his brush, and with teeth more like those of a wolf than a fox. Serious as the consequences were to me, they would have been far worse in the case of an ordinary farmer, who would not have had the means of organising the drive by which the end of his depredations was brought about.

It is held by some owners of forests that it is desirable to encourage foxes in order to keep down the stock of grouse, these birds being a source of annoyance to the deer-stalker. But, besides this being a somewhat selfish view to take, it is based on an imperfect knowledge of natural history. Foxes do, of course, prey on grouse among other animals, winged or four-footed, but the proper way to reduce the number of grouse is to let them alone, and to preserve

eagles. A pair of peregrine falcons will kill more grouse than any number of foxes.

It is also supposed that killing foxes causes a great disturbance in the forest. This, too, is an error; at least, in my own experience, such disturbance has no effect whatever in scaring the deer. Operations are all over long before the stalking season begins. There need be no noise beyond the firing of a shot or the indistinct yelp of a terrier at the bottom of a deep cairn of rocks, and, if there was, it would not prevent deer from returning to the place the next day if so inclined.

Under these circumstances, and seeing that it is a very sore subject with farmers, it would be well if those owners or lessees of forests who object to the destruction of foxes would reconsider the subject, and if those who are free from prejudice would make inquiry and see whether their servants do really use their best endeavours to clear the ground of animals so destructive to the property of their neighbours.

The only other serious difficulty between the sportsman and sheep-farmer is when sheep belonging to the latter stray into the forest and are not allowed to be fetched back. It would be unreasonable to expect the tenant of a deer forest to allow shepherds and dogs to go through the ground collecting sheep during

the actual stalking season, though I not only commit this extravagance myself without much injury, but have persuaded most of my shooting tenants to allow it to be done once in the season on a convenient day and with proper precautions. Still, this could hardly be expected where the neighbour is a farmer on an adjacent estate, and where strange shepherds are employed to gather the sheep.

But it so happens that the time of year when a gathering is most required by the farmers is just when it does the least injury to the forest. Twice in the year is quite enough to ask for—the first at the beginning of June, long before the stalking begins, when the lambs should be marked, and again as soon as the last stag has been shot, so that they may be sent off to the low country in good time for wintering. Then—that is, the middle of October—any old sheep would come in which had been missed at the gathering on the farm itself, and would be still in good marketable condition, while the earlier operation in June would also serve for the clipping which takes place very soon after.

In bringing these remarks on deer-stalking to a conclusion, I feel that an apology is perhaps due to my readers for the introduction, especially in the present chapter, of so much of the personal element

My excuse for this rests on the fact that the share taken by myself in the controversy which has raged on the subject has been so prominent. When I first entered public life I came to the conclusion that there existed a strong public opinion, based on an imperfect knowledge of the facts, distinctly hostile to the institution of deer forests; that unless someone took up the matter seriously and energetically, with a view to bring out facts and see that they were arranged in a shape which would be authoritative and easy of reference, the feeling above referred to might increase in intensity, while the opponents of the system, seeing there was practically no defence, might carry the outworks with a rush, and the owners of a valuable property would suddenly find themselves in a position of possessing the land indeed, but no longer having the power to devote it to any profitable use.

For many years I laboured in the hope, which success has now justified, that by affording to those interested in the subject the means of knowing the true state of matters, and by correcting many false impressions which had hitherto prevailed, I was doing good service to every class and every interest in the Highlands. This work entailed, as will be easily understood, a certain amount of unpopularity, and perhaps has met with scant recognition on the part of

those primarily interested in the maintenance of deer forests. As regards the first it will be admitted that many a cause far more important than this has, not without opposition far more bitter than any that I have encountered, been brought to a triumphant issue.

As regards the other, I have only to say that, if I have done any service to the owners and lessees of deer forests, the recognition which I should like best is that they should give careful consideration to the suggestions thrown out in a former part of this chapter; that they should endeavour to conduct their own sport with as little inconvenience as possible to their neighbours; and that they should try to secure not only amicable relations, but friendly intercourse and hearty co-operation between all the different classes which compose the population of the Highlands.

If, as I believe, the above may prove to be one result of these imperfect chapters on deer-stalking, it will add very largely to the pleasure which I have derived from writing these pages on the subject of the sport I love so well.

STAG-HUNTING

BY

THE VISCOUNT EBRINGTON

CHAPTER I

IN DAYS OF YORE

THE chase of the wild red deer, as practised in Devon and Somerset, is the only survival in England of a sport which was followed in earlier days in most countries in Europe, and which still has many devotees on the Continent. Books have been written on the subject from 1275 to this present time, and it is possible from them and from contemporary pictures to trace its development on both sides of the Channel for more than six hundred years.

Originally no doubt deer were hunted for food as much as for the pleasure of chasing them, so we find that for a considerable period nets and bows and arrows played as prominent a part in the chase as hounds. But these methods led to indiscriminate slaughter, and breeding hinds with young deer of both sexes were of necessity the most frequent victims of such attacks; the superior cunning of the old stags and hinds—the very animals whose death

was most desired—enabling them to escape. So in the fourteenth century at any rate, if not before, men began to recognise that if they would hunt or capture the best stag, rather than the first who should present himself, it was indispensable that he should be 'harboured,' *i.e.* that his whereabouts should be ascertained beforehand, and this so exactly that he should be roused with certainty and without loss of time. Of the arts and mysteries of woodcraft whereby this should be accomplished, and the stag subsequently hunted *secundum artem*, the fullest and most complete description is found in the writings of Gaston, third Count de Foix, who died in 1394 with eight hundred couple of hounds in his kennels.

He was a mighty hunter, and his book seems for centuries to have been the standard work on sport. Though rare now and almost forgotten, it was the basis of the earliest practical treatise on hunting in our language, the 'Mayster of the Game,' published at the end of the fourteenth century, and is quoted wholesale by Jacques du Fouilloux, a French author who wrote in 1561 : whose book in its turn achieved such celebrity that it was translated into English, German, and Italian, and became the real, though unacknowledged, parent of nearly every other volume that has been written on the subject since.

'Phœbus,' to use the name by which the Comte de Foix is most frequently mentioned and quoted, opens with an explicit declaration that the chase is the exercise by which we may best keep clear of the seven deadly sins, nothing being more opposed to idleness and indolence than the exciting life of the sportsman: and as he that shuns the seven deadly sins will be saved, the advantages of sport, combining enjoyment in this world with eternal happiness in the next, are more than obvious.

Jacques du Fouilloux, nearly two hundred years later, puts sport on a less lofty pedestal; he has come to the same conclusion as Solomon, that all things which are under the sun are but idle vanity. 'Wherefore, Sire' (he is dedicating his book to the boy King Charles IX.) 'methinks that the best knowledge which we can learn (after the fear of God) is to keep us and each man his neighbour in cheerfulness by the practice of honourable pastimes, among which I have found none nobler or more to be commended than the art of venery.' To develop this knowledge then, especially among the rising generation, he gives, partly from his own observation, partly by quotation from that noble hunter the Count of Foix, very full and exact instructions on every form of hunting. First comes a disquisition on hounds;

then elaborate instructions about harbouring, a chapter being devoted to each of the six signs, experience wherein may assure the harbourer that the stag which he recommends to the master is, indeed, a full-grown and 'warrantable' deer. All that is said on this subject is as true and correct now as it was then. Woodcraft changes as little as the habits of animals; but the method of hunting them is a different matter, and that has altered not a little.

Stag-hunting in the middle ages was a stately and solemn affair: 'rude and furious cries,' though permitted in boar-hunting, were forbidden as derogatory to that science of venery in which men then took their degrees. Even His Sacred Majesty Louis XV. had to hunt first hares, then roe, and then fallow deer for five years before he was allowed to hunt a stag; so we find very precise instructions in the old books as to the sounds and holloas appropriate to every incident. Du Fouilloux even gives quaint directions as to the place which is suitable for the meet, and what should there be done. A pretty and well-shaded spot should be selected, near a spring or stream; thither should the butler bring three good horses (no more and no less) laden with fluids, and the cook should follow him with cold meats to grace the cloth which has been laid on the turf. So shall the king or

great lord, with his companions, refresh themselves: and if there is an attractive lady within reach, she should be brought thither likewise, to help pass the time till the harbourers return and make their report. This heard, the great personage will decide which of the stags he will hunt, and will inform the favoured harbourer accordingly; 'then will all the harbourers go and drink,' for as the author sorrowfully remarks in the next chapter, 'nowadays they take more delight in the bottle than in their duty.'

The stag selected was not roused either by tufters or by the pack, but by the harbourers with their lymers, which seem to have been sleuth hounds, or what the Americans call 'smell dogs,' trained to hunt in a leash, without speaking. The preliminaries having been settled, and relays of hounds posted at likely spots, the field with the pack in couples followed the harbourer to the place where he had broken off branches high and low to mark where the stag had entered the cover in which he had lain down for the day. There the 'piqueurs,' who survive in the yeomen prickers of Her Majesty's Buckhounds, were to dismount and examine the slot, so as to grasp its characteristics, and know if later they changed deer. This done, they should go to points where they might best see the

stag break, while the harbourers, with their lymers in leash, hunted his line up to his bed.[1] The pack was on no account to follow at a less distance than sixty paces, nor to be uncoupled till the harbourer had got the stag fairly on his legs; as soon, however, as the pack had settled on the scent, the lymers were handed over to assistants, the harbourers mounted their horses, and followed the pack, keeping down wind, ready to give their help at a check.

Du Fouilloux, in a passage that might have been written by the master of any fashionable pack to-day, complains that the modern field hunt to ride instead of riding to hunt, and do not give the hounds a fair chance: 'riding among them, crossing and scattering them, so that they can neither run nor hunt.' The more orthodox practice seems to have been that the sportsmen should separate, making for points where they might view the hunted deer. So at least one may infer from the directions given to a previous generation in the 'Craft of Hontyng:'[2] 'How,' asks

[1] The procedure was similar even with foxhounds in this country till nearly the middle of the last century. See Daniel's *Rural Sports*, i. 130.

[2] 'The Venery of Mayster John Gifford and William Twety that were with King Edwarde the Seconde.' I am indebted for much information on these points to articles that appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* in April 1894, December 1895, and February 1896.

the author, 'shall we blow when we have seen the hart? I shall blow after one mote two motes; and if mine hounds come not hastily to me as I would, I shall blow four motes for to hasten them to me, and to warn the gentles that the hart is seen.'

The horn, it must be remembered, played a very important part in mediæval, as it does still in modern French, hunting. Everyone who called himself a sportsman carried one, whether skilled in its use or not, and no one was reckoned to know his venery unless he could blow the sounds appropriate to each and every incident of the chase. And the practice of riding to different points, so that someone should command the pack whichever way they went, was a wise one, seeing that much of the hunting was done in wooded country, guiltless of rides, but containing plenty of hinds and young deer, 'rascal' to use the old technical term, on which hounds might change.

But whether through the interference of the field or the cunning of the stag, no chase could be expected to go on long without a check; and if this check was serious, the pack, or the greater part of it, would be coupled up again, while the prickers unravelled the difficulty with their lymers and a few steady old hounds. In case the stag joined a herd, or resorted to doubling or other shifts, whether on land or

in the water, to shake off the pack, the prickers were recommended to carry with them a handful of boughs to throw down wherever they viewed the quarry, so that the baffled hounds might be taken with certainty to the spot where he was last known to have passed. If a bad check occurred between noon and three o'clock and the hounds were winded, the course advised was to mark the place where they last had the line, and go to the nearest village to refresh them with bread and water; or if there was no village at hand, the huntsman was to wait under a tree till the heat was passed, blowing his horn at intervals to summon the harbourers and other assistance. Then, when it was three o'clock they could go back to their mark and try to fresh find the stag, the harbourer taking the lead with his lymer, who might now be allowed and encouraged to speak on the line.

A chase conducted on these principles, even with a pack of fifty couples divided into three or more relays, must generally have lasted some time; but, as a rule, then as now, it ended in the water, the last refuge of a beaten deer. Nor is it possible to improve on the directions for this difficulty given by Du Fouilloux, wherein he advises that if there are three men with the hounds, one should get forward for a view while the others go one on each bank the men

riding near the water, that they may see the stag if he is lying in it, but keeping their hounds at a little distance on the landward side, that they may the better catch the line if the deer has left the stream ; for when he first comes out all dripping the scent will naturally be weak.

A chase sometimes lasted over two days, and full directions are given as to the best way of recovering a deer who has been given up for want of daylight or other reason over-night. But the old author naturally dwells at greater length on the successful ending of the run, and prescribes with characteristic exactness how the stag should be dealt with when at last he is brought to bay. And here one is struck by the stress laid on the fierceness of the stag's last fight for life, and the dangerous character ascribed to the wounds inflicted by his horns, which at the rutting season were supposed to be poisonous. Du Fouilloux professes to know so many instances of fatal accidents that he only quotes one, and there was a proverb, 'After the boar the leech, after the hart the bier.'

I suppose that the old hounds were often nearly as much exhausted as their quarry by the time they got up to him, and probably in many cases they only succeeded in doing so because the stag was leg weary and had waited till he became stiff ; whereas

the pace of the modern foxhound fairly wears deer down, and brings them to a standstill, unable to do much more in the way of either running or fighting. Be that as it may, the first directions given sound strange; namely, that if the stag is in deep water, the pack should be called off, coupled up and kept out of the way till the deer lands again, or comes near enough to the bank to be stabbed, or till a boat can be procured; the alternative being for the huntsman to strip and swim out, hanger in hand, and give the stag his death-blow in the water. This Du Fouilloux says he has done several times himself, and that before many men who can witness if he lie; if the stag stands to bay on dry land the pricker may steal up behind on foot and kill him, or if the deer breaks bay gallop up beside him and so use his sword.

The old sporting prints lately republished in the first numbers of the 'Badminton Magazine' illustrate many of the incidents. A woodcut by Hans Burgmaier, 1473–1531, shows the stag just roused by the harbourer and his lymer, the pack, which are smaller hounds of a different breed, being about to take up the running. Other pictures, somewhat later in date, show stags being killed both in water and on land, the field, some of whom have ladies riding pillion behind them, carrying and using spears. One picture

by Tempesta, 1555–1630, certainly justifies Du Fouilloux's complaint about the behaviour of the horsemen, two cavaliers being therein depicted riding lance in hand, regardless of hounds, to spear a stag who is galloping through shallow water with the pack at his haunches. The deer being killed, he was broken up with elaborate rites, different portions being reserved for the king, the *grand veneur*, the chief pricker, and the harbourer; the hounds and the lymers were separately blooded; the slot or fore-foot, then as now, was the trophy of the chase, and Du Fouilloux gives a picture in which it is being offered on bended knee to a great personage. The skin was the property of the man who had done the most towards the killing of the deer.

> What shall he have that killed the deer?
> His leather skin and horns to wear.
>
> *As You Like It*, iv. 2.

And though in the West Country the whole deer is now the master's to dispose of, yet the skin in practice nearly always falls to the huntsman's share, the master retaining only the head; and a good many people grudge him that.

CHAPTER II

IN FRANCE

THE preceding pages will have given some idea of what stag-hunting was in the Middle Ages. It is plain that its votaries in those days trusted more to the woodcraft of the harbourers and the prickers, and to the special training of the lymers, than they did to the science of the man who acted as huntsman, or to the nose, pace, and condition of his pack. And though of course there is less pedantry and formality about it now, yet stag-hunting in modern France, differing therein from ours, appears to be conducted on the same principles in the nineteenth as it was in the fourteenth century. And this continuity of practice must be my excuse for giving here some account of the sport as it exists at the present day across the Channel, instead of proceeding at once to describe that which is more familiar, if only by name, to English sportsmen.

Wheresoever a few men of our blood are gathered

together, whether in China, India, Australia, or South Africa, there there will soon be a racecourse, to be followed ere long, unless the nature of the country forbids, by a pack of hounds of some kind. We are apt to flatter ourselves that we alone of the nations of the earth are sportsmen, and that foreigners, with the possible exception of the Austrians, neither know nor care anything about hunting. It will be news therefore to many, that there are over three hundred packs of hounds in France, nearly as many as in England and Wales, of which twenty-two hunt wild stags exclusively, while another thirty-eight hunt both stags and other game, such as wolf, boar, and roe. There are thus sixty packs to our one kept in France, more or less for stag-hunting. Their country is forest to a large extent, so the harbourer does his work with a lymer; the hounds used are mostly crossbreds, founded on the Saintonge or Poitou breeds, though in some packs there is a strong contingent of foxhounds. The number of hounds taken out is moderate, and the system of posting relays all over the place, which was carried to excess in the royal hunts of the eighteenth century, has fallen into disrepute, though still practised within moderate limits; the young unentered hounds being led about by an active man on foot, to be uncoupled and shown their game at the finish,

while a few veterans, who have lost their pace but can still do good service in a difficulty, are put in charge of a mounted man (*relai volant*), who is expected to bring them up fresh at the right moment.

I am not sure that either of these functionaries is much to be envied. The man on foot, dragged hither and thither by three or four couple of excited puppies, all desirous of joining the chase which they hear in the distance, and constantly in their eagerness getting mixed up with the leash and each other's couples, cannot have quite a happy time, especially as he has a big horn that goes twice round his body to carry besides his whip. And though the Comte de Canteleu says that the duties of a *relai volant* are nothing when you are used to them, yet four couple of hounds tied to you and to each other appear rather a handful to convey at speed over rough ground, even on the handiest horse. If the stag is alone, the French draw with the pack, otherwise they use tufters, who do not always go on for the rest of the chase as they almost invariably do with us. The pack is usually kept at hand in couples, though the hounds of some kennels are so well under control that the couples can be dispensed with. French hounds, perhaps because they are less high-couraged than ours, certainly seem to be amenable to stricter

RATHER A HANDFUL

discipline, and also to have better noses. They are expected to be, and in fact when properly entered are, staunch from change, and will not only carry the line of their hunted deer through the crossing scents of a herd of others, but will discriminate between his scent and that of a fresh deer; will refuse to acknowledge the latter if they cross it in a cast; and will even turn aside from any deer but the right one who may jump up before them.

Just as no deer is the *exact* duplicate of any other in size and shape, so I suppose each differs a little in scent from all his fellows; and of course the scent of a heated, and still more of a beaten, animal differs from that of a fresh one: but this sagacity is remarkable. The Comte le Conteulx de Canteleu, to whose book [1] I am indebted for my information about French hunting, makes it clear, however, that trusty hounds can be depended on to mark the difference in these ways between a fresh and a hunted stag long before the latter is getting beaten; and he is emphatic in his recommendations to trust the hounds and let them run on if the good ones still stick to the line, even though the whole field declare that they have changed on to a hind or some other game.

In support of this he gives an incident from his

[1] *Manuel de Vénerie Française.* Hachette, 1890.

own experience, which I cannot forbear quoting in full :—

'I remember once, when hunting a boar with a very steady pack of bloodhounds, that I reached a piece of open ground in time to see a stag break cover in front of them. I would not have them stopped; I hurried on to the next wood, and got to the other side of it, only to see the stag break again and cross a little river, and then a field, the hounds still following and hunting keenly, even the best of them. Naturally I began to feel uneasy; pushing on briskly to a certain crossing-place a mile and a half on, I saw my boar pass it, followed at a hundred yards distance by the same stag. When the latter saw me he turned on one side; the hounds came up, and without doubting an instant went on upon their boar, whose line had simply been covered by the stag's.'

Hounds so trustworthy as this must be very good; yet, good as they seem to be, and freely as they are trusted, an efficient pack is in France only reckoned half the battle. Emergencies and difficulties are sure to arise which all the woodcraft of the men will be needed to surmount, especially if the hunted deer join others. For then the best hounds often refuse to have anything more to do with the chase, and if none but young hounds are carrying the line there is little chance of forcing the stag to leave his com-

panions, or of hitting the right and not a wrong line when he separates from them.

Accurate knowledge of the slot of the stag to be hunted, acquired if possible before he is roused by prickers and sportsmen capable of utilising it, is therefore insisted upon as being as necessary as good hounds to those who would chase a stag to his death. And curiously enough, though in the great forests of France the deer must see less of mankind than they do with us, it is remarked that they constantly seek refuge among the habitations of men when they feel that their end is near. If the last stand is made in water, the hounds generally drown their quarry; no longer need the hardy sportsmen swim out, sword in hand, to give the death blow; but if the deer stands to bay on land, they either shoot him or hamstring him with the hunting sword, similar to a bandsman's, which the huntsman and whips carry. This is another reminiscence of the days when men went to the chase armed as for war, and there are many others about the final ceremonies. The deer is skinned, the head being left attached to the hide, and the best of the joints are removed; the skin is then spread over what is left of the carcase, a pricker stands astride of it and holds the head upright, while the hounds are brought up; they are shown the dead deer, and stopped once

or twice from breaking him up to make them obedient. Then the skin is whipped off, and they are allowed to enjoy their portion while the horns blow the appropriate melody.

The horn still plays an important part in foreign hunting; all men belonging to the establishment, even those on foot, carry horns, the list of authorised sounds being nearly as long as that in our Cavalry Drill-Book; and though a great brass instrument that goes twice round your body must be an awkward thing to fall on, yet in a wooded country I have no doubt that when intelligently used it is exceedingly useful. The French horn appears in the sporting pictures in the hall at Longleat, and when the seventh Sir Thomas Acland kept the staghounds (1784–1794), according to Dr. Collyns,[1] he used to furnish some of the servants with French horns. 'These men were stationed at different spots round the covert, and gave notice that a warrantable deer had been viewed away by playing a particular tune upon the instruments.' Mr. Collier, writing in the 'Badminton Magazine' for January, 1896, says the French horn was likewise used in South Devon, and that if a man sounded the wrong call at the wrong time, he was made to taste the whip at the end of the day.

[1] *Chase of the Wild Red Deer*, p. 85.

CHAPTER III

IN DEVON AND SOMERSET

THE stag-hunting of which we have records in the West-country does not seem to have ever had very much in common with that which I have attempted to describe in the previous chapters. Probably the civil war took all restraints off poaching, and dispersed [1] many a pack of hounds: moreover, after the confiscations that followed, the landed gentry could not afford to keep up hunting establishments on the scale that prevailed in France. Hunting, besides, is a much simpler affair in open country than it is in forests,

[1] The Windsor pack, however, was kept up. See Whitelocke's *Memorials* for 1649: 'August 22nd.—I sent out my keepers into Windsor Forest to harbour a stag to be hunted tomorrow morning: but I persuaded Colonel Ludlow that it would be hard to shew him any sport, the best stags being all destroyed, but he was very earnest to have some sport, and I thought not fit to deny him. August 23rd.—My keepers did harbour a stag. Colonel Ludlow, Mr. Oldesworth, and other gentlemen met me by daybreak. It was a young stag, but very lusty and in good case. The first ring which the stag had led the Gallants was above twenty miles.'

and deer are apt, when their strongholds lie far apart, to make points for distant covers in a way that renders the task of a second horseman difficult enough, and would reduce that of a dismounted whip in charge of a relay of hounds to an impossibility.

Moreover, wild animals except deer were exterminated in England long since, so the woodcraft which has been fostered abroad by the survival of the boar and the wolf has not had in this country the same chance of justifying its existence and making itself useful.

It is recorded[1] that King Francis I. and Sir Thomas Fitzwilliam, after a long discussion of the English and French methods of harbouring and hunting deer, agreed to differ as to the merits of the two systems. This looks as if there had been some recognised distinctions in the practice of the two countries, though of these there is no trace in the old English works on the subject. One of the joint authors of the first sporting book in our language was a Frenchman, and little is said in it about stag-hunting. Its successors, from the 'Mayster of the Game,' written for Edmund Langley, fifth son of Edward III., till Dr. Collyns published the 'Chase of the Wild Red Deer,' in 1860, are all practically translations from the French; and I cannot ascertain that there was any dif-

[1] *Calendar of State Papers*, Henry VIII., vol. i., No. 1160.

ference between stag-hunting on Exmoor a hundred years ago and now, except that the hounds were slower, and the country wilder and more open.

The boundaries of the latter are not quite as wide as they were, but they have not changed much. They may now be said to be the coast on the north, and the Devon and Somerset Railway on the south, while the roads from Watchet to Wiveliscombe, and from Lynton to Barnstaple, enclose it approximately on the east and west; roughly, a parallelogram twenty-five miles by fifteen.

There are few parishes within this area through which hounds do not run every year, and the whole of it can be, and is, hunted from the kennels at Exford. There are besides two outlying districts frequented by the deer, the Quantock Hills between Taunton and the sea, and the Stoodleigh country between Dulverton station and Tiverton.

There are deep woods on the cliffs that overhang the Bristol Channel, and in most of the valleys that run down to it. Behind these there is in most places a strip of cultivation, and beyond that a belt of moorland, varying in width from three to ten miles, running without a check from the westward boundary to Dunkerry Beacon, and on from the latter with some intervals of enclosed land to Treborough. South of

this moorland there are more woods, and the country is for the most part enclosed; but the ridge between the Danesbrook and the railway (Anstey and Molland Commons), that between the Exe and the Barle (Winsford Hill), and Haddon Hill further to the south-east, are great expanses of heather, and it is across the wide tracts of open ground that the runs are best.

The chief strongholds of the deer are the Horner and Porlock covers, near the centre of the coast line; Haddon, ten miles south of Dunkerry Beacon; Badgworthy, seven miles westward; and the woods on the Barle and Exe between the two places last named. There are also deer in the south-west corner, in the Bray and Bratton covers, besides small herds and single deer at Slowley, Cutcombe and other places.

Though Exmoor is strictly only a parish formed out of the old Crown forest in the centre of the moorland, the name is applied indiscriminately to all the open ground; and indeed none but a native with considerable local knowledge can tell exactly where the boundaries of Exmoor run, the features of the country being almost identical on either side of the line. It is, however, a singular fact that though there is heather all round, there is hardly any in Exmoor parish, its place being taken by rough grass. Trees are conspicuous by their absence.

Perhaps, too, there is rather more wet ground on the forest than on its surroundings. But both the extent and bogginess of the wet ground are apt to be exaggerated by strangers.

The Quantocks are a ridge covered with gorse and heather, running northward from near Taunton to the channel at St. Audries ; they are only about eight miles long, very narrow, and intersected by deep combes, which are nearly all thickly wooded. I do not think it is possible to get bogged there, and this, coupled with the fact that the deer nearly always run the same way, renders the hunting on the Quantocks very popular with the neighbouring townspeople.

The Stoodleigh country has miles of cover along the Exe Valley and its tributaries, and the land around is all enclosed and very strongly fenced ; there were deer there as long ago as there are any records of the pack, but for many years prior to 1855 they had practically disappeared ; since that date, however, a small herd has grown up, which has little if any connection with any other.

The late Mr. Esdaile of Cothelestone claimed, no doubt with justice, to have turned out the first stag on the Quantocks. Very likely there had been wild red deer on those hills in former days, as there were at Bagshot, but there is no record of their ever having

been hunted by the old North Devon Stag Hounds, so they were probably extinct a century ago. In 1861, however, against the better judgment of Lord Taunton, Mr. Bisset commenced the formation of a Quantock herd by turning out both purchased deer and others captured on Exmoor. This herd, though it has no connection with those in the home country, has increased and multiplied to a somewhat alarming extent, and is now much too big for its very limited district.

With this exception, the country now hunted over is much the same as it was a hunded years ago. Before that there were wild deer in many parts of Devonshire. Lord Graves, on handing over the mastership of the North Devon Stag Hounds to the first Earl Fortescue in 1812, wrote, 'The present Duke of Bedford (the 6th) told me that his great-grandfather (Wriothesley, 2nd Duke, b. 1680, d. 1711) when he resided at Tavistock kept the staghounds. The principal haunt of the deer then was in Holt Chase, in the coverts on the banks of the Tavy, Tamar, Teign, Dart, and Torr rivers, on the side of Dartmoor. When run they often went to sea in Torbay.'

There is a tradition also that Squire Arscott, of Tetcott, near Holsworthy, kept staghounds as well as foxhounds, and there is a gruesome story of his whip having been eaten by the hounds one night when he

went incautiously in his shirt to stop a fight in the kennel. Coming back to Exmoor, we learn from Mr. Rawle's book [1] that there were forest officers there in Saxon times, and the early Norman kings seem to have hunted over it occasionally, when it was a Royal forest of some 80,000 acres, in which roebuck as well as red deer flourished. Hugh Pollard, Queen Elizabeth's ranger, kept staghounds at Simonsbath in 1598, and his successors probably did the same, the great land-owners of the district not taking up the task till 1740, when Mr. Dyke became master; he was followed by his kinsman, the first Sir Thomas Acland, and from that time the record is unbroken.

The old pack of hounds, bred expressly for stag-hunting, of which I shall speak presently, was sold out of the country in 1825, and for the next thirty years the sport had a very precarious existence, six masters and a committee following each other in quick succession. At last, in 1855, when things were at a very low ebb, the late Mr. Fenwick-Bisset came into the country and took the hounds. What he accomplished by unbounded patience and much liberality, coupled with unlimited capacity for taking pains, is most readily shown by comparing his first season with his last. In 1855 only four deer were killed in twenty-

[1] *Annals of Exmoor Forest.* Truslove & Hanson, 1893.

five days' hunting; in 1880–81 the hounds were out on ninety-four days, and the deer killed were seventy-five.

The present writer succeeded Mr. Bisset, and retained the command for six seasons. The Rev. John Russell saw his last stag killed during my mastership, having been entered to the sport by my great-grandfather seventy years before. I believe Mr. Stucley Lucas and Sir Frederick Knight are the only men still alive who hunted with the old pack. Till quite recently the latter was a first-rate performer across the moor, and dearly loved a gallop. One day he turned away from the hounds because the pack was not laid on a young stag who had broken for the open ground, his property. Whyte Melville was present, and hearing his reason remarked, 'If I would only ride over my own land I should have to do *my* hunting in a flower-pot.'

In 1887 Mr. C. H. Basset became master, also for six seasons; his wife was the heiress and descendant of the Colonel Basset, of Watermouth, who had hunted the country for seventeen years a century before. Mr. Basset's knowledge of hounds and of kennel management raised the pack to a higher standard of good looks than they had ever attained to previously; and their work in the field was quite equal to their appearance in kennel.

On Mr. Basset's resignation in 1893, Colonel Hornby, who had acted under Lord Coventry as vice-master of the Royal pack, took the hounds, but gave them up again in 1895, his place being then filled by Mr. R. A. Sanders, who is intimately connected with the country through his marriage with Miss Halliday, of Glenthorne. He has shown excellent sport in his first season and everything augurs well for his success, though he has been severely handicapped, as was Colonel Hornby in 1894, by the death of Andrew Miles, who had for nearly five and twenty years acted as harbourer.

There is no one connected with a stag-hunting establishment whose duties are more important, or on whom more depends, than the harbourer. It is his task to ascertain by woodcraft the whereabouts of a deer, suitable for the day's sport, so accurately that the animal may be roused without difficulty or delay, and yet so cautiously that he may not be conscious that he is being tracked and observed. All which is easier said than done.

Du Fouilloux enumerates six distinct signs with which the harbourer should be familiar, namely : the slot, the gait, the entries, the breakages, the fraying, and the fewmet.

The last are the droppings of the deer, and the old

author explains at length, adding illustrations, how they vary at certain seasons, and in deer of different ages. As he admits at the same time that they are not a sign on which reliance can be placed except in the summer months, and not a great deal of reliance then, it is curious that so much importance was attached to them: but the harbourer was expected to bring back a specimen with him in the bell of his horn, which was presented before anything was done for the inspection and approval of the king or master of the hunt. There is a quaint picture of this ceremony. The king is sitting by himself at table in a fur gown: a gentleman booted, spurred, and accoutred with sword and horn, displays the precious offering on bended knee. Behind him stands the harbourer with his lymer, grinning all over his face as he explains where and how he had found the fewmet, while the courtiers with uplifted hands are evidently saying, 'Now is not that a dainty dish to set before the king?

The Comte de Canteleu gives little value to this sign, except as a possible indication that there is a good stag somewhere in the district; and I expect that is about all it is useful for.

The 'fraying stock' is any tree against which the stags have frayed or rubbed their horns to rid them

of the velvet. By the height of the marks an opinion can often be formed as to the character of the head and the size of the deer. If the fraying is against a big tree, it is a certain sign of a big stag, though stags also fray against small trees ; the sign is universal, of course, only during the few days that the velvet is peeling, but in the fir forests of France the stags often fray the whole year round, and with us they do so at the approach of the rutting season. Thorn trees are frequently selected, and isolated firs and pines ; this used to be a great trouble to the late Lord Lovelace, whose choicest trees, being carefully placed apart from others, were very apt to suffer.

The 'breakages' need little description ; they are the dead boughs, twigs, ferns, and the like, broken and bent by a stag as he passes through a wood ; and their position will often show his height, strength, and size.

The 'entries' are similar traces left by a stag's horns : if they are high up and wide apart they speak for themselves as to the character of the head that made them.

Something is to be learned also from the feeding of the deer. If the bark of a tree or the ivy growing on it is gnawed up and down, it is the work of a hind : but if the bites are across the trunk they are a stag's.

As a rule, hinds feed more greedily, and stags, especially the old ones, more daintily; but Miles used to say that the common theory that a stag took but one bite out of a turnip before he threw it over his head, while the hind took several, could not be depended on; and that the only trustworthy distinction between the feeding of the sexes was the passion of the stags for the young ash-shoots on a newly-made fence.

The 'gait' and the 'slot,' however, are worth all the other signs put together, and it is on these that the good harbourer should rely. The main difference between the sexes is that the slot or footprint of a stag is rounder and wider at the heel, and has blunt toes, while a hind has pointed toes, and a long slot with narrow heels. A stag's dew claws point outward, and are large in proportion to his own size, while a hind's are small, turn inward, and point straight down.

A stag crosses his legs right and left in walking, while with a hind the prints of the hind foot will be in a direct line with those of the fore foot, unless she is heavy in calf; and it is curious, seeing how careful Nature is to protect animals in that condition, that they should in anything resemble the male at that period. The extra weight on the legs is no doubt the reason, and at calving time the stags are defenceless too, having shed their horns.

The stag moves with more confidence than the hind, so his paces are regular. The hind moves femininely and distrustfully: sometimes she will put her hind feet down in front of the spot from which she has just lifted her fore ones, sometimes on the same spot, sometimes behind it. A yeld or barren hind moves nearly like a young stag, but her sex will from time to time betray itself in the irregularity of her paces, even if the marks of her small and down-pointed dew claws cannot be detected. Moreover, though a young stag may open the toes of his fore slots in walking, yet those of his hind feet will always be closed: while with hinds all the toes are always a little open. A big stag, on the other hand, keeps all his toes closed, and if there is decided difference in the size of the hind and fore slots, that is one certain sign of an old stag; others are, closeness of the dew claws to the heel, a slight trailing of the toes of the hind foot, and the placing of it on the ground well behind the imprint of the fore foot. Yet another sign of an old stag, not mentioned by the French writers but pointed out to me by Miles, and reckoned infallible by him, is unevenness in the length of the claws of the hind foot.

None know better than those who have studied woodcraft, however slightly, that there are no hard

and fast rules in it, but centuries of observation and experience have shown that the signs mentioned can generally be depended on. Though of course they vary somewhat according to circumstances and soil in each case, everyone who calls himself a harbourer should be well acquainted with them, and should trust to them rather than to pothouse reports, or the chance of being able to watch a stag into cover when he comes off his feed.

To do his work properly a harbourer should be on his ground the afternoon before hunting, and should look round a bit then. Next morning he should be abroad very early. In France he invariably has a lymer with him, who may be one of the pack, but has always been specially trained for this work. With us, having long distances to traverse he generally rides. Such hounds as the Comte de Canteleu describes would be very useful, but there is no tradition even of their existence in our country. Miles used to declare that his old mare could wind a deer, and would let him know by her manner when she did, and I believe it; but I never heard of his trying to hunt a line with her.

With or without a lymer the procedure is similar; the harbourer makes his casts round the outside of a cover or chain of covers till he hits a line, or finds a fresh slot pointing towards it. In either case he will

follow the line till he satisfies himself whether it is that of a warrantable deer, and has ascertained whither, if warrantable, he has gone. He will then make it good round the wood the deer has entered, and if the cover be a very large one, will try to cut him off at some path or crossing place, so as to narrow the area within which the huntsman should draw. This requires to be done very carefully, or the deer may be moved. Special attention should also be given to the point at which the deer entered the cover, and a cast made round behind it, as often after going a few steps in, a stag will back it on his foil, and be off elsewhere. These feigned entries, as the French style them, have caused many a blank day, especially where there is no cover fence, and the heather grows right up to the edge of the coppice.

Harbouring as above described sounds a tolerably simple matter, but the weather may have been very dry or very wet, in either case rendering slotting very difficult; or something may have moved the stag after he had settled himself, or he may have been restless for some reason. They are always on the move when the rutting season is approaching, and accurate harbouring is then very difficult, though I remember poor Miles doing [1] a very clever bit of work under those

[1] October 10, 1881.

circumstances. His stag had gone up and down the whole chain of woods between Hele Bridge and Chilly Bridge, crossing and recrossing the Exe, but Miles never failed to hit his line. At last the beast set his head for the great covers in Haddon, and as slotting him across the lane into Swine's Cleave was an easy matter, and the scent was still fresh, we found him in five minutes. But the harbourer had been on his tracks for nearly as many hours, and had followed them more than as many miles.

The regular fee for the successful harbouring of a stag is 1*l.*, and when the work is honestly done it is well earned. In France, in small establishments, the same man sometimes doubles the parts of harbourer and huntsman. This must be very hard work indeed, though the knowledge acquired in one capacity would be of great service in the other; for the harbourer's acquaintance with the deer, their ways and habits, the paths they take through the various covers, and especially the places at which they cross the valleys, enables him to be of great assistance to the huntsman in the chase as well as during the preliminary tufting.

'Tufting' is the term applied to the process of drawing for a deer, and 'tufters' are the hounds used for the purpose. It is rarely possible or desirable to draw with the pack as in fox-hunting. Where there is

one deer there are generally more, and if all the hounds were thrown into cover at once there would be risk of their dividing all over the place, and running every deer but the right one, who would probably lie fast till his enemies were hunting hinds and young things elsewhere, and would then sneak quietly away.

A few hounds only are, therefore, selected for the purpose of finding the deer ; usually four or five couple, but the number varies according to circumstances. As the tufters have nearly always to run on with the pack afterwards, strong hounds that will draw and throw their tongues are needed, but any hounds that answer to these requirements may be taken. The tufters are not hounds *sui generis* at all, and in the course of the season nearly every old hound is likely to have a turn at it, as on some days—especially if the deer are together in the open—it may be desirable to choose hounds of great speed as being more likely to divide the deer. Four couple are usually enough for stag-hunting, and hounds in their first season should not be employed, though occasionally it answers to give a puppy who is afraid of the crowd this chance of settling quietly on the scent in cover.

Unless the harbourer is very sure where the stag is lying, he leads the huntsman to where the stag entered the cover as he came off his feed, the master

meanwhile taking up any position from which he can see best what happens, and the whip going to one of the points where the stag is likely to show himself, or to the side of the valley opposite the huntsman.

In ordinary weather hounds will generally be able to pick out the drag, and hunt the stag to his bed, but in such heat as sometimes prevails in August, and even in September, scent may not lie long enough for them to do this, and then the task of drawing the great woods all in full leaf, hour after hour, under a harvest sun is no enviable one for either huntsman or hounds; nor are things much better in heavy rain.

The French say that our hounds have very poor noses, but I remember at least two[1] instances when hounds hunted up to and found stags who must have gone in from feed fully six hours before; and curiously enough on both occasions there had been heavy rain falling all the time, enough one would have supposed to wash all scent away.

A great assistance when the tufters cannot hunt the drag is the fact that stags, like most animals, have their favourite spots in almost every cover; and successive deer will be found in successive seasons among the same rocks, or in the same hollow, just

[1] October 5, 1885, and August 13, 1886.

as successive woodcocks resort year after year to the same spring.

The worst thing that can happen in tufting is to rouse a hind or male deer before you find your stag; however quickly the tufters may be stopped there the fresh scent will remain to distract them. It is bad enough when your stag pushes up another deer soon after he has been roused himself. That difficulty you may get over by putting your hounds on the heel of the fresh deer, or by trying them again on the original line, but many a day has been marred by the former event, even though a second lot of tufters may be drawn to replace the first. Old stags will lie very close, and if found only by a single hound will even stand at bay and refuse to stir. I do not think they are often drawn over, but they are sometimes. Mr. Bisset relates how on one occasion 'that wonderful old hound, Joe Blackmore' the harbourer hit a stag's slot and hunted him to his bed in a cover the hounds had drawn blank. One[1] occasion I remember particularly when we found a stag in a very open cover, the Allotments, at 5.30 P.M., having already run through it twice, and drawn it once before without moving him.

I have known many a good run that did not begin

[1] August 21, 1885.

till three o'clock and after; but there is always a risk, if you do not find till late, of losing your deer for lack of daylight to kill him. So, as a rule, if the stag harboured cannot be found in two or three hours, it is better to look elsewhere; the man is more likely to be mistaken than the hounds. The greatest drawback to stag-hunting is the long time that frequently elapses before the right animal can be found, and the further delay that not uncommonly ensues before the pack can be laid on.

Horace Walpole, writing on January 31, 1750, says of Lord Sandwich: 'He goes once or twice a week to hunt with the Duke' (of Cumberland), 'and as the latter has taken a turn of gaming, Sandwich, to make his court—and fortune—carries a box and dice in his pocket; and so they throw a main, whenever the hounds are at a fault, upon every green hill, and under every green tree:' and it is related, I believe truly, of some sportsmen of the last generation, who were as fond of whist as they were of hunting, that they might occasionally, when the tufting was tedious, be seen enjoying a quiet rubber in a convenient spot, with a sentry on duty to warn them when it was time to take the field. Luncheon and love-making are the modern substitutes, especially luncheon.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHASE

IT is difficult to write anything fresh about the chase of the red deer. Actual runs are recorded week after week in the sporting papers; imaginary ones have been described, and well described, by Dr. Collyns, Whyte Melville, and others.

As soon as the tufters have got their deer away, they should be stopped that the pack may be laid on. A number of amateur assistants are a great nuisance to those engaged in tufting, but the help of a few who understand the business is most valuable, and this is readily given by the sporting farmers. At one time the huntsman nearly always came back to where the pack was kennelled, to report to the master, and to take his orders as to laying on; this often gave many extra miles of travelling to the already hard-worked tufters, and also led to much waste of time. Of late years it has been the practice for the master or huntsman, whichever is on the side where the tufters have

been stopped, to signal to the other if all is right to bring the pack on. A quarter of an hour or more is frequently saved in this way, and many a deer has been killed in consequence who would have escaped had he had a longer start.

Opinion is a good deal divided as to the expediency of giving a deer law. It is a complete delusion to suppose that our ancestors deliberately did so. As a rule they did, no doubt; but that was only because they could not help it, for the big woods had then fewer paths in them, and it was more difficult to get about. There is abundant evidence that when they had a chance to lay on close to a stag they took care to do so; Mr. Bisset's diary shows that his practice was the same.

If you give a light deer a long start, it will infallibly be a long time before you catch him, if indeed you ever do so at all; the best chance with such is that, thinking he has distanced his pursuers, he may lie down and get stiff: and then if you fresh find him and also have daylight you will probably kill him. If you give a heavy stag a long start the chase will no doubt occupy more time than if you do not; but one of two things is likely to happen: either the deer will lie down in the first bit of cover or water he comes to, and will wait there till the pack fresh finds him, after which he

will hardly keep out of view and be killed very quickly; or he will make use of his opportunities to push up hinds and young deer,[1] and will escape altogether. A fat stag cannot gallop any better than a fat horse, and nothing that anybody can do will enable him to live long before hounds in racing condition. I have seen excellent runs with deer of all ages on whom the pack had been laid hardly out of view; indeed, the leading hounds went away actually in view on the stag who gave the extraordinary run of September 22, 1883, from Culbone Stables to Castle Hill, and he weighed fourteen stone dressed and clean. So many cases occur when he cannot help giving the deer a long start, that the master in my judgment should be very cautious of rejecting the limited number of chances which he gets of laying on the pack quickly. An exception may and should be made—provided the weather is not too hot—if a heavy stag breaks over a good line of country with no chance of turning up a fresh deer for a considerable distance; but only then if the stag be a heavy one. The hounds want every advantage that can be given them with light galloping deer or with hinds.

[1] The deer thus disturbed sometimes resent the intrusion. I saw a stag thus interfered with turn and fight the hunted deer, and they continued fighting till the hounds ran right up to them.

Hinds, I believe, are occasionally hunted in Thuringia, where there is a pack of great Russian-bred hounds which accounts for thirty to forty stags in the year; but never in France. There is no reference to hind-hunting in the old books, and though the fallow doe was, according to the 'Craft of Hontyng,' a beast of chase, the hind is not mentioned therein as a beast of venery, or otherwise. Hinds, however, have been hunted on Exmoor for a century at any rate. Those who only contrast the stag's formidable antlers with the defenceless head of his mate may say, 'Poor is the triumph o'er the timid hind,' but that sentiment will not be echoed by anyone who has had practical experience of a winter's hind-hunting, and who has learned thereby how strong they run and how difficult they are to kill. The weather on the moor between the 1st of November and the 1st of March is often very trying and inclement; there is not usually much frost, but nearly always there is a great deal of rain. In almost any weather, however, the wild land carries a scent. At first the hinds will perhaps run round and round in a most exasperating way, and many days are marred by the hounds changing on to fresh deer when their hunted one is more than half beaten; nevertheless the sport is often first-rate. Especially is this the

case after Christmas, as by that time the calves are able to take care of themselves, and a mother when pressed by the hounds will leave her offspring and go straight away, instead of ringing round to the place where she hid the little one under a bush in the morning.

A deer, whether stag or hind, who has enough confidence in its powers to let the hounds come nearly up to it two or three times in the first hour, almost always runs strong; deer do not try to get clear away from the pack till they begin to fear their pursuers may overtake them. But if hounds catch a view of a deer after he or she has been running really fast for an hour and a half to two hours, that deer, barring accidents, will not get far away from them again.

I do not think the scent deteriorates when a deer is sinking, as the scent of a fox does; it alters undoubtedly in a way that draws the old hounds to the front, but the change does not lessen the pace at which they can run the line. Strong and sweet as is the scent of the deer, it is much better on some days than on others. The Comte de Canteleu remarks that in the rutting season the scent of the stag is absolutely distasteful to the lymers, and that it is likewise affected by the shedding of the horns. This, if it be the case, is another instance of the way in which

Nature protects animals when they are from any reason less able to protect themselves; but as we hardly ever hunt stags at the time they are hornless, our experience throws little light on that question. I have often seen hounds run very hard after stags had begun rutting, and that even in unfavourable weather. But it is difficult on any day to declare beforehand that the weather, however unpleasant, is unfavourable for the chase of the wild red deer; for hounds will run when, literally, one can hardly sit on a horse. Du Fouilloux propounds a theory that the stag has a repugnance to a northerly or southerly wind, 'in such sort that he will never runne into it but takes it in his tayle,' to quote Turberville's translation. Lord Graves also roundly asserts that deer always go down wind; but so far as my experience goes they care little or nothing for wind, and whether the wind blow towards it, from it, or across it, will make their point. It is next to impossible to turn a deer from his (or her) point if his mind be made up. It is easy—very easy, alas!—to divert a deer from a good line to a bad one, but the contrary is very difficult, even if you know the right way to set about it.

It is of little or no use to ride at a deer and crack your whip, but by galloping parallel to him, between

him and the cover, and edging gradually away from him toward what you wish him to avoid, you *may* get his head in the right direction. Deer have their runs just like hares, and their own pet places for crossing valleys and streams: the latter hardly ever change. It is said that almost every deer roused in that part of the New Forest still passes Rufus' stone—the place where the Red King waited for his shot; but the line of country crossed between the favourite resorts varies a little nearly every year, and in certain seasons many runs will end in a fashion which in another season is quite exceptional.

Thus in 1885 eleven stags out of twenty-seven were taken on dry land and only four in the sea, while in 1886 thirteen days out of twenty-eight ended on the beach; on three others the deer were killed close to the sea, and only four stags were killed on dry land.

The waters of the Bristol Channel are a common resort of deer when hard pressed. I have never heard of the deer taking to the sea except when hunted, yet all the same they know where and how to get down the cliffs, which are quite precipitous in many places; but a man can always scramble down where the deer have gone, and it is very seldom that the deer fail to get safely to the bottom, though

occasionally when hounds are very close to them they make a mistake and fall or jump over heights which are fatal. I can only recall three such occurrences now, and in two out of the three some of the hounds shared the fate of the stag. A most disastrous day was August 18, 1884, when a stag after a good run went down through the woods to Glenthorne. Some of the leading hounds caught a view of him near the house, and raced him across the lawn. There was a path to the sea close by, but in his panic the stag jumped over the cliff, a sheer drop of sixty to eighty feet, and five hounds followed him. The fall on to the stony beach killed the stag and one hound on the spot; two of the others broke their legs and had to be killed where they lay, but the other two, strange to say, recovered; one of them remained crippled, but the other was hunting again before the end of October.

A somewhat similar incident occurred on another occasion, September 23, 1881, but then no hounds were hurt. The third was on a very wild tempestuous day, January 6, 1882. It was impossible to hunt on the moor at the advertised fixture, so the hounds were taken to disturb a distant cover, the farmers about which were complaining. From that they ran what was reported to be a hind to the cliffs near Bossington Point,

SWAM OUT, THE WHOLE PACK AT HIS HEELS

when the hind proved to be a one horned stag who was facing the hounds at bay near where the steep grassy slopes are merged in the cliff proper. There were only three of us there and two went down to try to get the hounds away, but they heeded neither horn nor voice in the tearing wind, and foot by foot they drove the stag back, nearer and nearer to the edge, till at last he turned and went over; two hounds followed, and neither they nor the stag were ever heard of again.

Almost at the same place, earlier in the same season, there had been a different scene. The stag had got safely down and swam out, the whole pack at his heels. It was a glorious day—September 14, 1881—the same on which Iroquois won the St. Leger. The sea was quite calm, and the race that ensued between the stag, the hounds, and two boats, one from the shore and one from a brig in the offing that tried to capture him, was nearly as exciting as that at Doncaster; the hounds dropped back by degrees, except Credulous, who stuck to the stag the whole time, fully half an hour, and was brought back in the boat with him.

The great majority of the runs end in the water, whether it is that of the Channel or of one of the many streams which intersect the county. And it is a

beautiful sight to see a stag standing at bay in one of the latter. Contrary to the received opinion, he keeps his head up, only lowering it if he wishes to use his antlers. If the stream happens to be in flood and the stag chooses his position so that he can stand while the hounds must swim, it is not easy to take him. Sometimes a rope is needed, but usually it can be managed without even that assistance; two men who understand how to do it can hold almost any stag, and then the poor beast is quickly put out of his pain. It would be very inhuman to let the hounds kill him, though in many instances they could and would do so unassisted. If the pack get a deer into deep water where he must swim they will drown him, and they will even do that sometimes in the sea, though unless much exhausted a stag (or hind) can generally swim faster than any hound; for deer swim very well, whether in salt water or fresh, and will 'keep the sea'[1] for over an hour if it is calm, and for more than half that time even if it is rough. There are stories of their crossing to the coast of Wales, and as the distance is only twelve or fourteen miles it would not be impossible, sup-

[1] Du Fouilloux says he has known of deer driven to sea by hounds being taken thirty miles out by fishermen! Pliny credits stags with swimming thirty leagues.

posing the deer just caught the ebb tide on one side, and the flowing tide on the other. There is no doubt that red deer have been seen occasionally in Glamorganshire, and it is not easy to account for their presence there in any other way, unless they had been dropped overboard by some coasting craft which had made a capture on the way up Channel, and feared trouble if they took the animal into port. There is a case on record of a hind picked up by a passing collier being claimed at the port of entry by the Receiver of Wrecks, who very handsomely returned her to Mr. Bisset.

But the incidents of the chase are many and various. The Comte de Canteleu's saying that stags nearly always make for the abodes of men when they are sinking has already been quoted. I should not go as far as this, but wild deer in their extremity do get into as curious places as carted ones, and have been taken before now in greenhouses, in bar parlours, in bedrooms, and on the roofs of houses; one even went through Sir Thomas Acland's house at Holnicote, entering by an open door, and going out through a closed window.

The cunning of a red deer is only equalled by its endurance, and its endurance by its cunning. They will often go a mile and more in the water without

touching either bank; as a rule they avoid going under bridges, but exceptions to this are not rare; an old deer is too clever to go far up stream if the water is heavy, but young ones will do so, and, of course, tire themselves out in the effort. They completely baffle the hounds sometimes, even when quite exhausted, by sinking themselves entirely except their heads under water; they give off no scent then, and the hounds are so busy with their noses that they constantly fail to see what is very obvious to those with them. There is another dodge which has saved many a deer, and which may deceive even the cleverest huntsman, especially as deer seldom attempt it unless they are a good bit ahead of hounds. Sometimes then they will enter a stream, go up a little way in the water; land, and go up a bit further along the bank; then re-enter the stream and go down it to some point far below that at which they had originally come to the water.

The huntsman watching his hounds will see they carry the scent into the water with their heads up stream, and will cast them upward; presently he will hit the line where the deer had gone out on the bank, which will confirm him in believing his deer to be above him, and he will go on casting up accordingly, getting further astray every yard that he goes; and

twenty minutes lost in a long and fruitless cast will add a great deal more than twenty minutes to the rest of the run after the true line has been tardily recovered.

There are some very late finishes on record with the modern Devon and Somerset, as there were with their predecessors. Mr. Bisset killed his first stag by candlelight at 7.50 P.M. on September 28, 1855, after a chase of over seven hours, the pack having been laid on quite close to the deer at 12.50. We gave up a stag about the same hour on September 10, 1883, being then twenty miles from the kennels. We found the same stag again on October 10 ; he ran the same line almost field for field, but that time we killed him. On this day a well-known local doctor visited a lady in an interesting condition on his way to the meet, promising to call in again presently ; this he had an opportunity of doing early in the course of the run, but finding his services were not yet indispensable, he went on and saw the stag killed, returning to his patient in time to bring a fine boy into the world. It is said that his father once did all this, and gave surgical assistance to a cow as well, in the course of a day's hunting. On September 29, 1884, we tried, though in vain, till 8.45 to kill a young stag found nearly five hours before ; but the run of September 22, 1871, was the most remarkable all round, for on that day hounds

killed at 8.30 after running through twelve different parishes for over five hours—during the first part of the time at a great pace. Besides the hunt servants only six saw the finish: of the six, three were farmers, all mounted on ponies by Old Port; and of the three, two—Messrs. Bawden and Westcott of Hawkridge—had ridden the whole chase bare-backed and in their shirt-sleeves; the former with nothing but a hemp halter for bridle.

Such an incident speaks volumes for the sporting instincts of the farmers who are the backbone of our stag-hunting. No class enjoys it more, and no class does more to promote its prosperity.

The chase of the wild red deer has a very strong hold on the people of the country round Exmoor. Of course the hundreds of tourists and sportsmen whom it attracts bring money into the district; and nobody is blind to the advantages of that. But the deer do a good deal of damage, and though there is a damage fund, which gets larger every year, the men who benefit most by the sport are very often not identical with those who do most for it. There is no mistake, however, about the feeling of the people of the country; all classes, from the landlord to the labourer, take a keen interest in the hunting. Everyone on the road, as the hounds go home,

KILLED AFTER RUNNING THROUGH TWELVE DIFFERENT PARISHES

inquires anxiously about the day's doings, and the huntsman is sure of congratulation or sympathy as the case may be when he answers the inevitable question, 'Hav' ee killed?' which is addressed to him from every house and cottage that he passes.

CHAPTER V

HOUNDS AND HORSES

FROM the deer that are hunted to the hounds that hunt them is an easy transition.

In old times the North Devon pack was composed of 'staghounds,' bred according to a local receipt given in these words by Lord Graves in the letter previously mentioned :

'*First cross.*—Put a thoroughbred heavy staghound dog to some large thoroughbred foxhound bitches . . . this is not *yet* the breed required.

'*Second cross.*—Put the bitches, the product of the first cross, when 15 months old, to a thoroughbred staghound dog, and to some thoroughbred heavy staghound bitches put those dogs the product of the first cross that are the most promising. The product of this last cross is the sort required.

'After a few years, should a cross be required from another kennel, which is very necessary, cross with a sharp staghound, but by no means with a foxhound.

'By following these rules our pack has acquired its excellence. Indeed, there are no other thoroughbred staghounds in the kingdom, the other kennels being tainted with foxhound blood.'

It will be observed that Lord Graves, with a master's pride, speaks of the hounds thus crossbred as *thoroughbred*, and a good proportion of the pack were home-bred on these lines; but two old hound lists of 1812 and 1820 at Castle Hill show that several recruits were also obtained from outside, drafts being recorded therein from the King's kennel, from the Oaks (Lord Derby's) 'never worth anything,' from Lord Ailesbury's, Mr. Wellesley Poole's, Lord Fitzwilliam's and others.

The royal pack, of course, hunted deer, and had only lately given up hunting wild ones. Lord Derby's, I believe, were staghounds too, as were probably Lord Ailesbury's, but Lord Fitzwilliam tells me that his ancestor's pack were foxhounds and nothing else, so I fear Lord Graves's favourites were rather a mixed lot.

His Majesty's Brusher heads the first list, and though 'very old' and only 'supposed to be thoroughbred,' he was the one hound used as a stallion in 1811, and had twelve and a half couple of whelps to his credit at walk the June following.

I wonder if he was as good and as fond of venison

as a namesake, by Belvoir Brusher out of Warwickshire Audible, who did much service between 1882 and 1886, being sent in the latter year to France to be used at the stud there.

What the 'thoroughbred heavy staghound,' who was the foundation of the pack, may have been like, must now be very much a matter of conjecture. 'Stonehenge'[1] says: 'The old English true staghound, which is now nearly if not quite extinct, resembles the bloodhound, but has a lighter cross, probably with the greyhound, and therefore somewhat approaches to the modern lurcher in formation of body, with the head of a southern hound. . . . Like the bloodhound, and the old southern hound, this dog has the peculiarity of keeping to the hunted deer. . . . There is some difficulty, however, in getting at a true description of the old staghound.'

Dr. Collyns, writing in 1860, gives the following description of the old North Devon pack, with which he had often hunted as a young man: 'In height they were about twenty-six to twenty-eight inches, colour generally hare pied, yellow, yellow and white, or badger pied, with long ears, deep muzzles, large throats, and deep chests. In tongue they were perfect, . . . even when running at speed.'

[1] *The Dog*, p. 53. Edition of 1872.

A picture is added from which they appear to have had, beside 'the bloodhound-like heads and deep throats,' shortish necks and somewhat heavy shoulders, with hind quarters rather light for the rest of their body. They do not look like going fast, yet they must have been able to travel, for they killed their deer on a fair proportion of days; and in November, 1816, accounted for five hinds on five consecutive hunting days, no mean performance: again, on August 26, 1815, they killed in two hours and a half a fine stag which they found under Charles, and ran by Bray Cross and Simonsbath to Horner Green.[1] Lord Graves, however, warns the new master, never, if it can possibly be avoided, to hunt a young male deer, lest the severity of the chase should disable hounds and horses for a fortnight; and that is sufficient proof that the old pack, whether from want of pace or from imperfect condition, or both, could not go on running for two or three hours at the high speed necessary to bring 'a light galloping deer' satisfactorily to hand. Yet they had some first-rate sport. The moorland was nearly all unenclosed then, deer crossed the country in all directions more freely than they do now, and

[1] The present pack covered nearly the same distance, over much the same line of country, on October 3, 1888, in an hour and forty minutes.

'the longest chase ever remembered,' from Horner to Satterleigh, nineteen miles as the crow flies, was accomplished in a little over five hours on October 8, 1815: and they killed a hind on April 15, 1817, not far from the same place, after running her for seven hours and five minutes. This was eclipsed, however, in point of time on August 22, 1815, when they laid on about 10.30 not far from Dulverton, and took their stag in the Channel about 7.30 with Chorister on his back; and again on October 5, 1819, when the pack was laid on at 10.30, and taken off without blood at 7 P.M.

Their admiring chronicler, endorsed as we have seen by 'Stonehenge,' claims for the old pack that, like the French hounds, they would not hunt change, but would stick to the line of their own deer, though intermixed with that of others.

The Master's private diary, however, casts doubt on this—*e.g.* August 11, 1812: 'Laid a couple of steady hounds on a fine slot of a stag, but they crossed to the scent of the hind and went off with her.' April 18, 1815, 'We went through Mr. Brickdale's coverts and were about to kill her, when a herd of nine deer crossed the pack and we *of course* lost the hind,' while a passage in the 'Chase of the Wild Red Deer' shows that they had their share of graver faults, for it is there told how on October 18, 1789, Sir Thomas Acland drew the

Shillets with the pack, and the hounds ran sheep, killing several; whereon 'His Honour' in his wrath desired the huntsman to hang the whole of them and then himself. Other masters since, beginning with Sir Thomas's successor, have had to contend against the same vice, the scratch pack especially, which he was compelled by an outbreak of rabies to form in 1879, giving Mr. Bisset much trouble. It may be that there is some affinity between the scent of the moor sheep and that of the deer; certain it is that the young hounds want very careful breaking against this propensity. I was never presented with a bill for unlawful mutton, and I have not heard of any of my successors receiving one either, but any relaxation of watchfulness would quickly bring disaster.

The old pack disappeared in 1825, and with them the old blood; their successors have always been foxhounds. The standard is 24½ inches, and they come unentered from all parts of the country, seldom more than two couple in a year from the same pack. Uniformity of size, however, is secured by the great height insisted on; and this, coupled with their long unrounded ears, gives the pack a character of its own. Mr. Basset also got them very 'sorty' in general appearance. Lord Graves in 1812 pronounced foxhounds 'from their nature altogether unqualified

to beat or try the water,' and the Comte le Couteulx de Canteleu, though freely admitting the value of our blood as a cross, finds little to praise in foxhounds but their courage and constitution, and does not recommend them except for boar-hunting, on account of their inferior noses, their proneness to change, and their tendency to run mute.

There is no doubt that many of the Devon and Somerset are mute, or nearly so; it has been suggested that the heat of the weather at the time of year when they are entered has something to do with this, and it may be so. But sometimes, when the scent suits, nearly every hound will speak, while on another day, though they run as well and as hard, nearly every hound will be silent. We shall never know much about scent, or why hounds hunting a deer run in file, while in every other chase they carry a head, till we get a hound that can talk and explain it.

Our hounds will hunt a deer truly through the intervening scent on the same path of a fox or hare, but it must be admitted that they cannot be depended on to carry the scent of a hunted stag through the lines of fresh ones; and there are few who, if they catch a view of a deer, will not be after it whatever it be. Experience has proved, however, that they will 'beat and

try the water' as well as can be desired ; indeed, there is no better otterhound than a broken-down stag-hound, and their noses are good enough, as has been mentioned previously, to enable them to hunt a deer to his bed hours and hours after he has gone thither from his feed ; while their courage, drive, and pace enable them to do more work, and to kill more deer, than any pack that preceded them.

People sometimes ask why we prefer such tall hounds, and why we are not content with a pack of ordinary stature. It is probable enough that twenty-three- to twenty-four-inch hounds would do the work as well ; but nobody ever parts with hounds of that size unless there is something wrong with them, and the extra inch is a distinct advantage in long heather ; the big ones can stride over it, where little ones would be always jumping. In the water, too, the height is a help ; not only because they can wade where shorter-legged hounds would have to swim, but also because they can more easily scramble out of the flooded streams in winter ; the size and weight must also be in their favour when tackling a stag at bay. However this may be, the 24½-inch standard practically limits the pack to dog hounds, and in the last twenty years there has been but one lady in the kennel—Restless, by the late Lord Portsmouth's Reveller from B.V. Remnant.

Though quite as tall as her fellows, she was always known as *the* little bitch, and was a great favourite with the huntsman, as she was a good tufter, could go the pace, and threw her tongue besides. Curiously, however, she did not care to go up to a deer, and was once seen baying at a calf not much bigger than herself.

Most hounds would have pulled the calf down, and eaten there and then as much venison as they could; even a full-grown stag has little chance against the pack; I have seen one rolled over like a fox in the middle of a grass field; and another time, when a stag had taken refuge in an outhouse, the doorway of which he nearly filled with his horns, the hounds went boldly up to him and pulled him out by the head and ears. Only a single one was slightly hurt, indeed, it is wonderful how few hounds are injured by the stags; there are instances of three or four being wounded by one deer, but Mr. Bisset never lost a hound from this cause through all his long mastership. His successors have not all been so fortunate, but the hounds who are killed on the spot or die of their wounds are very few. The horses of the field cause many more casualties than the horns of the stags.

Reference has been made to the old idea that

wounds from a stag's horn were nearly always fatal, but I am not aware of any reason for believing it. I know the boar is looked on by Ceylon sportsmen as far more dangerous to approach when at bay than the sambhur; and as far as my experience goes hounds are less likely to suffer from the after effects of horn wounds than deer are from bites. A great twenty-five-inch hound makes a terrible hole with his teeth, and I am sure it is misplaced humanity to let a deer go, whatever its age or sex, if it has been the least mauled. I remember the hounds once running up a yearling hind in the stag-hunting season. We saved her apparently unhurt, and I gave her to a friend. Unluckily, she had not quite escaped, and there was one deep bite in her thigh. My friend made a pet of her, turned her out with his fallow deer, and took every care of her, but the bite never healed, and she had eventually to be destroyed.

But although the stags do not do much to shorten the lives of their pursuers, yet a staghound's career is not a long one. The season generally lasts fully eight months. The work is very hard, and the water hunting in winter very trying. Lord Graves said the pack should never run after the end of October, 'you otherwise lose your best hounds by the chill of the water, which occasions violent convulsions, and ter-

minates the life of the poor animal almost immediately. The only remedy on this occasion is frequent and profuse bleeding;' and Dr. Collyns endorses this, though he would allow hunting up to Christmas if the weather be mild.

The theory may be sound, but in practice the hinds have to be killed, and the hounds must hunt whenever the weather permits for eight months in the year to do it. Only once in the last forty years has the number of deer killed in the season exceeded the number of days' hunting; and in that year the deer were extraordinarily plentiful: the present average is about eighty days' hunting and sixty deer. Two or three times in most seasons, a brace of deer may be fairly killed in one day, but unless the pack has divided, this very seldom occurs in hind-hunting.

In 1867 not a stag escaped of all on which the hounds were laid; in 1880 eight stags were killed in eight consecutive days; while in 1886 the pack did not lose a *stag* for the season, and fourteen were accounted for in succession on the last fourteen days of stag-hunting.

These, however, were exceptional performances; and the huntsman not unfrequently has to come home without blood, though he may have worked

himself, his hounds, and his horses almost to a standstill.

The hunt servants rarely change, and the names of two at least will always be associated with the sport, Joe Faulkner in old, and Arthur Heal in modern, times. The former died over fifty years ago, but he seems to have had a marvellous aptitude for the chase. His temper was abominable and unrestrained : an old man at Castle Hill, of which he was a native, told me that if things went wrong in the field 'he would damn all the gentlemen except Lord Fortescue;' and he was very fond of the bottle. Consequently he was continually being dismissed, and as regularly was found indispensable and taken back again, at one time as huntsman, at another as whip. Arthur Heal was his complete opposite in habits and language, though when it came to the sport they would have been on common ground ; nobody quite knows how old Arthur was when he ceased to be huntsman, but it was extraordinary how to the last he retained his quickness and dash, which he could combine on occasion with infinite patience, and always with great sagacity and knowledge.

Except for a few weeks, the pack has never had more than one whipper-in ; there would often be occupation for three or four, when there are many

deer on foot, but as that number would be impossible, successive masters have contented themselves with one. And though among the sporting farmers there are not a few who understand the work thoroughly, and are always ready to help if they are out, the whip has plenty to do; a quick man with a good eye is indispensable; the more so as outside assistance cannot be depended on in hind-hunting, and there are no *piqueurs* in charge of spare hounds, as in France, who can go on with the huntsman if the whip be on the wrong side of a valley, or otherwise thrown out. At one or two fixtures the pack is sometimes divided, part being kennelled at one place and part at another, so that one lot may be within reach wherever the deer breaks, but we have never adopted the French system of *relais volants*, though I saw our present huntsman with such a team once. It was when he had just been taken from the stables to fill the whip's place in the middle of the season. He did not know the hounds, and the hounds did not know him, but he was full of zeal, and he proved himself a man of resource.

We were hind-hunting; many deer were on foot, hounds had divided a good deal and were all over the place, when Anthony was seen coming down the road toward Cloutsham surrounded by a small pack.

He had met them and stopped them off a stag on the wet ground on Dunkerry, and with his couples, the straps of his breastplate, a handkerchief, a bit of string, and the thong of his whip had captured and secured three or four couple : it was a good performance, but I think he was glad to hand them over to the huntsman, especially as he was able to get his second horse at the same time.

The men always have two horses out, frequently a pony for the tufting besides ; but the best second horseman cannot always be in the right place, and the days, as has been shown, are sometimes very long, even for two horses.

People ask, not unfrequently, whether horses do not require a special education before they become comfortable mounts over Exmoor ; but provided they will look where they are going, and change their legs if they see they are about to put their feet into a deep rut or on to a big stone, they are all right, and any horse with sense soon learns that much ; though if he has run on the moor as a young one, or been ridden quietly over it during the summer it is all the better, as then he is less likely to get frightened if he finds himself up to his girths in a bog.

As in most countries, not less depends on the rider than on the animal he bestrides ; only you

cannot hope to see the end of a long straight run unless you have blood and condition; if your horse is a good hack too, all the better, for you may probably have a long ride home, but nothing is essential except blood and condition; both of the best.

For light weights horses between 14.2 and 15.2 are to be recommended, as they get down steep hills with more ease to themselves than bigger animals; yet there are big horses who will go brilliantly. Some years ago an officer spending his winter leave on Exmoor, had a fine upstanding horse by Roman Bee, which he rode well to the front with the utmost regularity. This horse was good enough to win a steeplechase at Sandown in the spring following, and was sold for a large sum. The owner had also a pony about two hands less in height than the steeplechaser, and he went as well on the one as on the other; very few could beat him.

All the same a valuable Leicestershire hunter is not in his place with the Devon and Somerset, and a despised hireling not worth 30*l.* will often be a better mount. Over such a country light weights have of course a great advantage, though there have always been heavy men who could hold their own, whatever line the hounds ran, and however deep the country might be; but such men belong to the limited class

who always pay attention to what hounds are doing, and know the country and understand the sport thoroughly. Without these qualifications a man cannot ride successfully to staghounds.

Sometimes one hears, generally in sporting novels, of an unknown sportsman visiting a Strange Hunt and 'cutting down' all the best men belonging to it, in the run of the season. Perhaps this happens occasionally in a straightforward country, but it is doubtful if it occurs in those where the best horseman in the world may get into hopeless difficulties for want of local knowledge, which none but a native can possess.

And this is especially true of Exmoor. There are few coombes that you cannot cross in many places, but there are still fewer which it is wise to cross except at certain points. Moreover, though you may ride many miles over the moor without encountering a fence, yet you are bound to come to one sooner or later, and as they are generally unjumpable, with gates a long distance apart, it is best for the stranger to follow someone who knows his way about.

Probably a horse *could* go wherever a stag can (except over fences), but the scent may easily lie a few yards right or left of where the deer has passed, and in wet ground those few yards may make all the

difference. Even deer will get fairly bogged occasionally, and a horse in the same place would no doubt be in worse difficulties. Riding to the stag-hounds, therefore, generally resolves itself into riding in groups. There may be a score of men out, each of them capable of taking the best line, but if there is only one best line they will naturally ride together, followed by those who cannot go alone, while other groups will be seen making for every point of the compass except that toward which the hounds are heading, some to gain a place of vantage whence they hope to get a view of the chase; others whose horses are not fast, or are not fit, to make a short cut to what they conceive to be the deer's destination; while others, who do not want to go far from home, will hang about on the chance of hounds turning back toward them. And of course not unfrequently hounds do come round to those who have ridden to points; but if the run be a fast and a straight one, nobody has a chance but those who have got a good start, and have stuck as close as they can to the pack throughout.

To the doing of this there is no royal road, but one thing is certain: namely, that if you wish to be with hounds after they have crossed a valley, you must descend into that valley with them, for they will

certainly go up the opposite hill a great deal faster than your horse.

There are occasions when it is wise to draw rein and watch, but that is where knowledge and judgment come in ; and as they cannot be taught from a book, it is useless to say more.

CHAPTER VI

DEER

REFERENCE has been made to the number of deer generally killed in the season, and in this connection it is often asked how many deer there are in the country hunted by the Devon and Somerset. It is a question difficult to answer, and there is not much encouragement to be found in a letter now before me, written to the then Master in February 1883 by a gentleman who is reckoned an authority, in which he begged that hunting might forthwith be discontinued, on the ground that the herd in the home country, which by elaborate estimates he calculated at 197 and no more, would not stand any further diminution. Hunting, however, went on, and in three years from the date of the letter hounds had killed 188 deer in the districts in which, on paper, only 197 existed : so if the estimate had been correct the deer would have been well nigh exterminated. Yet the average number killed for the last ten seasons is 60 !

You cannot take a census of wild animals, and the only fact we have to go on is that some 60 deer can be and are killed year after year without any apparent reduction in their numbers in the country. From this I believe the total head of deer to be about 400. For if 60 are killed without reducing the stock, there must be a similar number born and reared to replace them; and if there are 60 hinds who rear their calves, there will be fully 120 who are too young or too old to breed, or are barren or who fail to rear their calves. That would make nearly 200 hinds of all ages; and as we know of nothing to cause any permanent inequality of number between the sexes, there is likely to be a male deer for every female—which gives 400 in round figures as the stock at the beginning of the hunting season. As Scotch authorities say that to keep a herd stationary in numbers you should not kill more than one-eighth to one-tenth, and as quite six deer come to grief independently of the hounds every year, it may safely be said that this estimate is a moderate one.

A good many people will call it too high, on the ground that no one sees deer in such numbers; but the time that the deer show themselves is the winter, when the public does not hunt, and even then for

every deer that you do see there is pretty certainly another that you do not.

It may be added that in 1520 the number of deer reserved on the royal forest of Exmoor was 100; that Lord Graves in 1812 put the stock at 200, 100 fewer than it had been forty or fifty years earlier; as only 108 were killed in the next six years, it seems likely that his lordship's estimate was too liberal, or else there was a great deal of poaching.

Strangers inquire as often about the weight of our West-country stags as about their numbers. We always weigh the carcase dressed and clean, without head, skin, or slots, so comparison with Scotch records is not very easy. Stags nowadays seem to be heavier than they were a century ago, and it may be questioned whether the common explanation of better feed is the correct one; for though turnips were not grown in the days of the old war, yet, as the furrows still show, there was land tilled for grain then that has long relapsed into heather, and the deer no doubt took tithe and toll of it then as they do now. Only the weight of the haunches is given in the old records, and this but occasionally. The following entries may be quoted: Aug. 23, 1780, 'The great stag,' his haunches weighed 105 lbs.; Aug. 26, 1814, 'a large stag,' the haunches weighed 38 lbs. (each); Aug. 25,

1818, 'a very old stag,' the haunches weighed above 40 lbs. (each).

Of course it is easy to cut a haunch so as to weigh a few pounds more or less ; but 40 lbs. would be a very moderate weight for a haunch now. The lightest of fourteen stags weighed at the kennels in 1892 turned the scale at 154 lbs., the heaviest being 250 lbs. The following exceptional weights have also been recorded : Aug. 27, 1877, 290½ lbs.—with the skin on, but without head, &c.—weighed at Holnicote ; Sept. 7, 1881, 280 lbs., weighed by Mr. Rock of Gratton ; Sept. 15, 1884, 280 lbs., weighed by Mr. Marley, Porlock Ford ; Sept. 7, 1885, 275 lbs., weighed at Dunster Castle. A good average hind of four years old and upward will weigh about 108 lbs.—they very seldom carry any flesh ; but an old hind killed on Feb. 12, 1889, was no less than 135 lbs. ; she was and apparently always had been barren, and was in good condition.

It has been stated by a Scotch writer that the heaviest deer do not usually have the best heads, but that is not our experience. Three of the four heavy stags last referred to had particularly fine horns ; the difference, however, in weight of carcase between the old stags and those of the present day is not repeated in their heads.

Dr. Collyns writing in 1860 says, 'It is rare at the present day to kill a stag furnished with horns of such size as many of those kept at Castle Hill, Barons-down, Holnicote, Worth, and elsewhere, as trophies of the chase in times gone by.' It may be doubted, however, whether this was true in 1860, and certainly it is not now, as the subjoined measurements will show. Mr. Birmingham measured Sir Thomas Acland's heads; the others were kindly measured for me by Mr. Rowland Ward. The obituary notices assigned to the heads of Sept. 5, 1803, and Aug. 14, 1812, are not *quite* certain. The former was bought at the Worth House sale a few years ago; so there can be little doubt that it came off a stag killed by the hounds while Mr. Worth had them, and as its points correspond with those of Mr. Worth's first stag, and it was honoured with gilding, I have put it down to that day's sport. The other may have been killed from the Stoodleigh covers on Oct. 12, 1814, instead of on Aug. 14, 1812, but is unquestionably one of my great-grandfather's trophies.

The harems of our master stags seldom exceed half a dozen hinds; and this, coupled with a milder climate and good food, would account for there being as a rule more substance and growth in the horns of our deer than in those of Scotch ones. They do

Date when killed	Length on curve	Circumference	Widest outside	Widest inside	Points	Remarks
	inches	inches	inches	inches		
1788	33	6½	43	29	6+6	Found in Badgworthy Wood; killed at North Molton. Property of Sir T. D. Acland. Said to have weighed 294 lbs., but this is only tradition
1792	33	5⅛	43 tip to tip	29½	7+9	Found in Dean Cleaves; killed at Rawleigh Mills. Property of Sir T. D. Acland
Sept. 5, 1803	37½	5	22⅛	30½	7+7	Found in South Chilham Wood; killed near Ilfracombe. Property of Mr. Nelder, Carnarvon Arms, Dulverton
Aug. 14, 1812	35½	5	20⅞	27⅛	6+6	Found in Emble Wood; taken off Porlock Weir. Property of Earl Fortescue
Oct. 7, 1814	32	5⅛	30⅜	30⅜	7+4	Found in South Wood (Goodleigh); killed at Appledore. Property of Earl Fortescue
Sept. 10, 1816	30½	5	24½ widest outside	29½	6+6	Found in Buttery Wood (North Molton); killed at Chilley Bridge. Property of Earl Fortescue
Aug. 27, 1877	33	5⅜	39 tip to tip	32	7+7	Found in Selworthy Plantation; killed at Horner Mill. Property of Sir T. D. Acland
Sept. 5, 1881	33	5⅜	13	25	8+7	Found in Drucombe Wood with the pack; killed in Withycombe Village. Property of Viscount Ebrington
Sept. 7, 1881	34⅜	5⅜	23⅛	31½	6+6	Found in Gratton Wood; killed below Challacombe Bridge. Property of Viscount Ebrington
Oct. 21, 1885	38½	5⅛	17⅞	31½	6+6	Found in Cockercombe; taken off Watchet. Property of Viscount Ebrington
Oct. 25, 1893	36⅜		21½	28⅞	6+7	Found in Cockercombe; killed in the greenhouse at St. Audries. Property of Sir A. Acland Hood

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not often grow many points. Eighteen and nineteen points are on record, twice in 1786, and again in 1871, but I know of very few heads with four or more points on top of both sides, and all the 'rights'—the venerable term for the three lower antlers, which has survived with us from the fourteenth century. There were only two such among the hundred and fifty stags killed in my mastership. Heads of twelve points are common enough, and that with all the tines of good length, but the extra development seems to tend as a rule, not to the multiplication of points, but rather to increased length and weight in the beam, and especially in the brow antlers, which are often over a foot long, and sometimes reach fifteen inches. The bez, or bay antler, the royal antler of the old books, the next above the brow, is frequently quite short, and is often wanting altogether. Once only have I seen a bay antler growing from the back of the horn instead of the front. This was on the head of a fine stag that we killed from Haddon on September 19, 1884; the formation is common, however, in the wapiti. I have never seen or heard of but three heads with only brow antlers and two on top, like a sambhur—one killed in 1799, theothers in 1883 and 1895; the first an old stag, the second a three-year-old, the last a full-grown stag with a broken leg.

Old stags often grow eccentric and deformed heads. There is a pair of horns at Eggesford which came off a very fat old stag many years ago, which are merely uprights about a foot long : a nine-year-old stag had a similar head in 1872. Cases of brow antler and upright on one side, or brow, trey and very short points on top, are not uncommon, but I have never

Age of deer	Lord Graves	Dr. Collyns	Dr. Clarke's deer	Comte de Canteleu
1 to 2	Short upright	Upright	Upright	Upright
2	and small brow	Br. upright	Br. B. T 1, nearly 2 feet long	Upright or 3 or 4 points
3	Brow and upright	Br. T. upright	Br. B. T. 3 & 2	7 or 8 points
4	Br. T. upright	Br. B. T. 2 & 1	Br. B. T. 3	10 or 12 points
5	Br. B. T. 2 & 1	Br. B. T. 2	Br. B. T. 3. All points on top long	12, 14, or 16
6	Br. B. T. 2, both horns	Br. B. T. 3 & 2	Br. B. T. & 4.	14 to 20
		Br B. T. 3	Br. B. T. 4 This deer would have been reckoned by his head to have been a 3-yr.-old at two, and a 5-yr.-old at three	

seen a perfect caber slat head (brow and a long upright): and it is curious they should not exist in the West of England, though they are of frequent occurrence in Scotland. Bifurcated bay and trey antlers, which are often seen in Germany, are very rare on Exmoor; but Nott stags are not unknown. The only

thing really certain seems to be that you cannot tell a stag's age accurately by his horns, and that the authorities differ as to the head a stag may be expected to bear at different ages. The preceding table makes this very plain, and it may be interesting to compare it with the description of the horns shed each year by a stag that was stolen off Exmoor by a Dr. Clarke of Lynmouth about forty years ago, and kept in a small paddock by him ; the said horns being now in the Albert Museum at Exeter.

Br. signifies brow antler, B. bay, T. trey : the figures thereafter indicate the number of points on top. This table may be further compared by the curious with the following, which is taken with additions from Mr. John Fortescue's book, and brought up to date, and shows the heads actually borne at their death by a few deer whose ages were known.

In the cases, at any rate, of those deer that were originally taken as calves or yearlings, there can be no doubt about the age at death, and it will be noticed that in hardly any instance was the head what, according to the tables, it ought to have been. The nineteen-year-old stag was hardly bigger or heavier than a very large hind—indeed, he weighed only 3 lbs. more than the yeld hind mentioned on a previous page. Two other instances are known in which deer, proved by

Date of first capture	Age at first capture	Date when killed	Appearance of head when killed
1853	Had 2 on top both horns	Oct. 5, 1860	Br. T. 3 on each horn
May 11, 1860	2 years	Sept. 6, 1870	Br. T. 3 on each horn
May 9, 1861	3 years	Oct. 7, 1862	Br. T. 2 on each horn. Small but even
Sept. 11, 1863	'A splendid stag'	Sept. 2, 1864	Br. B. T. 3 both horns. The same points as previous year, but heavier horns
Oct. 27, 1863	Calf	Jan. 4, 1872	Uprights, with no points at all
April 18, 1864	1 year	Sept. 30, 1870	Br. B. T. 3 on each horn
Oct. 30, 1866	3 years	Aug. 22, 1871	18 points. Br. B. T. 7 and Br. T. 6
Aug. 31, 1868	—	Aug. 31, 1869	Br. T. 2 and Br. B. T. 2. Had 2 on top the previous year also. 'Constitutionally wrong'
Oct. 10, 1868	—	Sept. 25, 1869	Same number of points as previous year, but bigger beam
Sept. 28, 1869	—	.16,1872	Br. B. T. 1 and Br. B. 1. Had 2 on top one side if not both in 1869
Oct. 19, 1870	2 years	Sept. ,1874	Br. T. 3 and Br. T. 4. Points blunt and jagged
Jan. 1, 1872	3 years	Aug. 28, 1873	Br. B. T. 2 and 3
Jan. 19, 1875	Calf	Aug. 28, 1882	Br. B. T. 4 and 2. A very fine head
Aug. 13, 1875 or May 28, 1879	3 years Calf	Aug. 19, 1885	Br. T. 2 and 3. A fine widespread head
Aug. 28, 1876	4 years	Aug. 27, 1880	Br. B. T. 4 and 3
Dec. 2, 1876	1 year	Aug. 30, 1883	Br. B. T. 4 on each horn. A splendid stag
1877	1 year	Aug. 15, 1894	Br. T. 2 and 3. Beam long, but very light
Dec. 13, 1877	5 years (about)	Sept. 23, 1878	Br. T. 3 and 2
Aug. 31, 1881	2 years	Sept. 1, 1884	Br. B. T. 2 on each horn
Sept. 27, 1883	3 years. Br. T. 2. on each horn	Oct. 9, 1886	Br. B. T. 3, Br. T. 3. A fine head with long points
March 26, 1884	Calf	Oct. 8, 1890	Br. B. T. 3 Br. T. 2. Horns rather light
1890	Calf	Sept. 21, 1895	Br. T. 2 on each horn, with an offer for Bay

their worn-out teeth and other evidence to be of great age, had quite small and shrunken frames. What becomes of the old deer? They are not all killed by the hounds: a few may meet with foul play, but some must die a natural death. Yet it is hardly ever that their bodies are found. Those of young deer are met with occasionally; they get injured jumping fences in the dark, or starved during a deep fall of snow, or catch inflammation of the lungs after a severe chase in cold weather; for some reason these accidents oftener occur to young male deer than to hinds, but it is very seldom, if ever, that one hears of a real old stag perishing in such ways. Probably, when they feel their end is near, they go away and hide themselves, as wounded animals do, and die in solitude. But even then it is strange that their decaying carcases do not attract attention in a country where staghounds or foxhounds are through nearly every cover every week.

I have never heard any explanation that accounted for this satisfactorily, for the hinds would not eat carrion, though there seems little doubt that they will eat both bones and shed horns. The time at which the horns are shed is with us about May 1, the old stags first, and the velvet is lost between August 20 and September 15.

Miles considered that a stag who had had a good mother would grow his horns earlier and stronger than one who had perhaps lost his dam before he was five months old; this seems reasonable as regards the first pair or two of horns, at any rate. I cannot trace any satisfactory connection between the weather and the development of the horns. Undoubtedly the best heads are better in some years than in others; but it was remarked that they were generally very fine in 1881, the season following one of the heaviest snowfalls on record in the west of England.

One-horned stags are not uncommon; three were killed on the Quantocks in 1895; one, a very old stag, was supposed to be the father of the others. As far as could be judged from the skulls, none of the three had ever had more than one horn, the tap root of the other being stunted and withered. A one-horned stag is at no disadvantage in the rutting season, so there is no inherent improbability in the hereditary theory in this instance. A hind with horns is the heroine of a great chase which took place in France in the time of Charles IX. in the forest of Amboise, and the Comte de Canteleu speaks as if horned hinds were by no means unknown since: but there is no tradition even of such prodigies in the west. The well-being of the deer has no doubt been

greatly promoted by the abolition since 1862 of hind-hunting in May; only barren hinds were supposed to be hunted then, but mistakes were made: and even if they were not hunted the want of quiet must have been very prejudicial to the mothers of the herd so short a time before the date at which they dropped their calves—an event that takes place usually in the middle of June, though there are authentic cases of calves being dropped in September, as also of twins.

Such differences as exist in the times and seasons between Scotland and Exmoor, and between Exmoor and the Continent, are however easily accounted for by the difference of climate and latitude: the habits and nature of the red deer remain the same, and those who seek his death whether with rifle or with hound, have similar need of endurance and tenacity, and must be familiar alike with his habits and his wiles.

CHAPTER VII

NOTES FOR VISITORS

A FEW notes as to the most convenient hunting quarters in the Devon and Somerset country may be of service to some of those who read these pages.

Exford is the most central place: the kennels are situated there, so there is always company and guidance to be had both out and home. On nearly four days out of five, the fixture is within six miles, and there are only three meets more than ten miles distant. Further, and this is no slight advantage, it is not often that the return journey to Exford after hunting is a very long one. Occasionally it takes the hounds four hours and more to get back to kennel, but on the great majority of days the distance does not exceed from five to eight miles. On the other hand, Exford is decidedly out of the way: there is a telegraph office there, but it is twelve miles from a station; and there is not much to do on off days unless you have enough horses to hunt with the Exmoor Foxhounds and the

Quarme Harriers, as well as with the Staghounds. Both these packs begin hunting early in September, and both meet regularly in the neighbourhood.

Cutcombe is nearly as central as Exford, and is four miles nearer to Dunster station; but the same remarks as to off-days apply, and it is not quite so well placed for the Foxhounds.

Winsford is four miles the wrong side of Exford for the best meets, but is very convenient for the Dulverton country. It is only six or seven miles from Dulverton station over the hill, but more by the driving road.

Dulverton is too near the southern boundary of the country to be well placed for such meets as Cloutsham, Hawkcombe Head, Culbone Stables, &c., which are near the Bristol Channel; but it is very central for the fixtures in its own district; and the hunting days there are from a quarter to a third of the whole. The Stoodleigh country, the Dulverton Foxhounds and the Quarme Harriers are also within easy reach; as later in the year are also the Tiverton Foxhounds and Sir J. Amory's Harriers. The other places mentioned above are mere villages, but Dulverton is a small market town; and as the trains run conveniently from it to both Taunton and Exeter, it is the most accessible of all the hunting quarters, being slightly

superior in this respect to Dunster and Minehead, on the other side of the county.

These are both favourite resorts of hunting people and tourists. They are not very near to any of the meets (except one, reputed the worst in the country), and it is always a long way both out and back from them to the Dulverton fixtures; but the West Somerset Foxhounds and Minehead Harriers are kennelled near, and they have a good many advantages in other ways, especially on non-hunting days; moreover, they are the only places from which you can hunt in comfort both on Exmoor and on the Quantocks.

Porlock and Porlock Weir are too much at one end to be very suitable for those who wish to attend every fixture, but are excellent homes for those who only want to hunt on the north, which is the side of the country where the sport is best and the meets most numerous. I suppose one-third of all the deer killed die within three miles of Porlock Church, and certainly for the winter hind-hunting no more desirable quarters can be found. The Exmoor Foxhounds are generally within reach, as they are also from Lynton and Lynmouth; but these last are at one corner of the country, so the distance to the meets of the Staghounds is seldom less than eight miles, and the ride home after hunting generally more.

Simonsbath has most of the advantages of Exford except that of the telegraph office, and most of its disadvantages, being rather farther from nearly all the meets, though rather nearer to a station. The local guide-books give full information as to hotels; but I may mention that most of the clergy are ready to let their parsonages to hunting visitors during the autumn months, and that many of the farmers take lodgers. Mr. Sanders had a printed list of lodgings prepared in 1895 which is procurable at the kennels. Horses can be hired from Taunton, Barnstaple, and South Molton, as also at any of the places named, except Simonsbath, Cutcombe and Winsford. Visitors who bring their own horses with them will do well to make sure beforehand that the stabling offered them is suitable, for it is by no means good everywhere. It can be very cold on the moor, even in September, as well as very hot, so warm clothing should not be forgotten for either man or beast.

THE COOKERY OF VENISON

BY

ALEXANDER INNES SHAND

THE COOKERY OF VENISON

VENISON plays so important a part in the story of the human race, that volumes might be devoted to it. But even in the merest sketch in outline, it must be treated historically, romantically and practically. We must go back to the birth of the world as we know it, and to the opening chapters of Genesis. When our first parents exchanged the fig-leaves for skins, we believe all commentators are agreed that their rudimentary costume was a dress of deer-hide. As they had been expelled from their garden, and had neither ploughed nor sown, we take it for granted that they lived on the game they killed. The patriarch Isaac had flocks and herds in abundance, but although 'the world's grey fathers,' like the Bedouin, lived chiefly on a ilk diet—on curds and koumiss, and light dairy preparations—Isaac seems to have been a gourmet. He loved savoury meat, and had a predilection for venison or rather antelope-

flesh. But his sight was defective though the teeth were sound, and we may assume, also, that the sense of smell was failing. No doubt, in the sultry climate of Palestine, there was no possibility of hanging meat, otherwise neither venison nor the delusive kid would have been brought straight from 'the field' to the table. But the upshot of that eventful piece of deception was, that Esau, having been robbed of his birthright, turned his back upon pastoral pursuits. He became the chief of a race of hunters, and the father of the roving Edomites, with their hand against every man. They multiplied and spread over the wildernesses of Mesopotamia, and the sandy wastes of the Arabian deserts. Then what between hunger and greed, when fired by the match of fanaticism, they broke out of their deserts under the prophet of God, and threatened to overrun Europe with their locust-like swarms. So that had Esau come home half an hour sooner with his haunch of venison or hind-quarter of antelope, the destinies of great part of the world would have been altered. No Count Julian would ever have opened Europe to the Arab hosts; the Alhambra, the Alcazar of Seville, the many-coloured mosque of Cordova, would never have been built in the quaint magnificence of Oriental architecture; the Vega of Granada and the Huerta of Valencia might

never have been watered with indestructible irrigation works, and then, when the Moslems were pushing their adventurous enterprise, the grandsire of Charlemagne would not have had the chance of saving the Church and Christendom in the carnage on the field of Tours.

But we are soaring a flight considerably above the cooking-range, Grove's, and the London Tavern. Turtle and venison !—they are the symbols of civic luxury. We dare to say that the typical haunch, with all that precedes and follows it, from the iced punch and Madeira to the curious old cognac, has done more than the example of Whittington or Gresham to animate aspirants to the gown and the golden chain. It is like the leg of mutton on the greased pole scrambled for by ragged tatterdemalions. But that mutton, as the may-fly on the stream, is swallowed and gone, whereas the civic haunch is perpetually renewed, and a thing of joy that ever repeats itself. The pity of it is that the alderman cannot revive the edge of his appetite as the houris of the Mahommedan Paradise renew their blushing charms. Surfeit will lead on to satiety, and venison and burgundy with sedentary habits end in the gout, dyspepsia, and doctors' fees. We shall have something to say about sauces afterwards, but after

all, there is no such condiment as hunger. We venture to aver that the most successful banquets of venison have come off somewhere in the Wild West of America, between the Alleghanies and the Sierras. The wayfarer has gone dinnerless for a day or two, or the wandering mountain-man may have feared to fire a shot, knowing that he may be ambushed by hostile Indians. He has kept body and soul together, as best he might, on snakes and lizards and 'such small deer.' In the end starvation has got the better of prudence. With gloating eyes and trembling pulses he has stalked the tempting buck and dropped him. As he has risked so much he will hazard something more. He gathers fuel and kindles a fire, though aware that the smoke may betray him. But as he butchers the slaughtered deer, he is thinking only of dinner. He slashes out the liver and lights. They will warm more quickly over the smoky blaze, while the fillets he has sliced from the haunch are grilling. If he is an epicure he sprinkles the meat with powder from his horn, and he washes down the repast with long draughts from the rippling stream. It is not far removed from the rude Abyssinian feast, where the beef-steaks were cut from the living ox; but did ever man dine more heartily or deliciously? If he had his personal medical attendant, he would be

warned against the imprudence of over-indulgence after prolonged abstinence. Being reckless, he does not give the matter a thought, and though he has no dinner-pills in his 'possible-sack,' no evil consequences ensue. The mountain air is the most invigorating of tonics. Imagine a Lord Mayor, with his unrivalled opportunities, gifted with such a swallow, and such incalculable digestive powers, and you have the ideal of mortal dignity with the perfection of sensuous bliss.

That, no doubt, is an extreme case. Now that the world is being rapidly settled up, and that there are well-marked trails and victualling stations scattered about in the interior of the Dark Continent and the Highlands of Central Asia, men are seldom reduced to such sharp extremities. But we have always considered it a great take-off to the enjoyment of the sportsman-gourmet, that however hungry he may be, he must wait indefinitely for dinner. The hunting larder is replenished from day to day, as the manna in the wilderness was fresh gathered each morning. The hunter, after many a weary walk and stalk, comes back towards nightfall with the choicest portions of the deer. The fire may be in readiness, but he must possess himself in patience while the dinner is cooking. We have seen a starving cur watch the gnawing of a bone of which he hopes the

reversion, and we greatly doubt whether the miseries of suspense are repaid by any subsequent satisfaction. Moreover, slips between the platter and the lip must be counted with. Some alarm may disturb the camp, or the sudden descent of a thunderstorm may put out the fire. One of the most pathetic incidents we have come across in the course of our reading is chronicled by Ruxton in that delightful book, 'Adventures in Mexico.' He had been riding for days on short rations, when he reached a town where he could do some marketing. He and his hungry cavalry escort were seated round the great pot simmering over a fire in the Plaza, containing the unusual luxuries of beef, fowls, onions, and eggs. There was no venison, by the way, on that particular occasion, though he lived chiefly on the deer that fell to his rifle, but the moral is the same. Ruxton sat smoking a *puro* voluptuously, and inhaling the odours of the *puchero*. At last came the moment of projection. With precautions he raised the earthenware kettle, when the bottom gave way and the contents were precipitated. Tableau—of traveller and troopers, who had to mortify the flesh as usual on Mexican beans and cakes of buckwheat.

But there are historical deceptions nearer home, over the haunch or the neck. It was Theodore Hook,

we think, who was engaged to dine with a friend, when, looking down through the area railings next door, he saw a glorious haunch revolving on the spit. With the promptitude of genius, his resolution was taken. He happened to have a slight acquaintance with that neighbour : he knocked, walked upstairs, palmed off one of his plausible stories and was duly invited to stay to dinner. The expected haunch never made its appearance. Queries were insinuated and explanations ensued. The host's friend in No. 99 had a party that evening, and his own kitchen range being out of repair, he had sent in that noble haunch to be roasted. We know it was Hook who, strolling through Mayfair with Terry, the *protégé* of Walter Scott, was arrested, as Lowell sweetly sings, in 'The Biglow Papers,' by

> Ketchin' smells of roast and boiled
> A' comin' from the kitchen.

Again he looked down and saw his favourite joint. He did not know the gentleman who owned it from Adam, but again he walked in, presented his friend, procured an invitation, enjoyed an excellent dinner ; was, of course, the life and soul of the society, and won the gratitude of the good gentleman he had victimised by making the evening go off delightfully.

So much so, that he could afford to close his brilliant improvisations on the piano with the confession,

> I'm very much pleased with your fare,
> Your cellar's as prime as your cook.
> My friend's Mr. Terry the player,
> And I'm Mr. Theodore Hook.

Dropping into poetry, like Silas Wegg, naturally suggests Goldsmith's famous 'Haunch of Venison.' The tuneful Oliver, who paid his way by fiddle-playing abroad, and went singing through the world, 'with a light heart and a thin pair of breeches,' said rueful grace in immortal verse for a gift he had received but never enjoyed. We all know the tale of that quarter of venison, and the recipient spoke of it feelingly,

> . . . for finer or fatter
> Never rang'd in a forest or smok'd on a platter.
> The haunch was a picture for painters to study,
> The fat was so white, and the lean was so ruddy.

Hesitating 'to spoil such a delicate picture,' the haunch went to Sir Joshua in Leicester Square, doubtless in gratitude for many a good dinner in prospective. Reynolds might paint it or eat it, as he pleased, but Oliver kept the neck and breast. He had not been so generous as appeared at first sight, for, in our opinion, a good neck can more than hold its own with the haunch; and as for the breast, that goes

into the pasty, when, instead of speculating on a slice which may be better or worse at the will of the carver, you may cut and come again in a round game, where there are prizes and no blanks. That is to say, if the cook knows his or her business, and condiments and savouries are judiciously introduced. We all know how that pathetic tragi-comedy ended. The Jew and the Scot—still kept a corner for the pasty. And after all that pasty never appeared, which is another illustration of the moral as to slips between cup and lip.

Goldsmith offered the haunch for Reynolds to paint; and the red or the fallow deer, dead or alive, running afoot in forest or park, swinging from hooks in the sylvan larder, or served at the princely or baronial feast, have played a conspicuous part in English art and poetry. For venison is essentially a British dish, and the cooks and cooking books of France and the Low Countries have very little to say to it. They treat casually of the roebuck with the hare, but take small notice of the red deer. So Weenix seldom introduces a stag in his studies of game, although the antlers and graceful head would be the crowning triumph of a trophy. That is simply because, except in the far south, the forests are few and far between, and in the north each tract of broken

woodland was indefatigably hunted by packs of wolves.

Vert and venison with us were strictly guarded by the atrocious severity of the Norman forest laws. The deer were preserved, under pain of death or mutilation, for the sport and table of the sovereign. Even under the Tudors there were still 70 royal forests, 13 chases, and no fewer than 700 parks. The park was enclosed by oaken palings, and the forest was defined by natural boundaries, by streams, metes or meres. The barons and the monastic orders were granted privileges in their own domains by special licence. We may be sure that the Church took excellent care of itself. Landseer's picture of 'Bolton Abbey in the olden time' carries us back to the jovial days which preceded and hastened the dissolution of the monasteries. The portly prior, with the flower of the holy brotherhood, is standing over the slaughtered deer. The good monk is grateful for the gifts of God, and though the smile of expectant complacency is benignant, woe be to the brother who presides in the kitchen, if he 'sins the mercies' by careless cookery. We can conceive his stern air of solemn reprobation, by referring to Scott's companion picture, dashed in with pen and ink, in the 'Monastery.' The Abbot of Saint Mary's had paid a visit to the lonely tower of

Glendearg. The saintly man had been rewarded for the effort by the sight of a sublime haunch which had not been brought up in the hampers on the sumpter mules. And the sympathetic refectioner explains in glowing terms the *provenance* of the unexpected dainty. 'So please your Holiness and Lordship, he is a son of the woman of the house, who hath shot it and sent it in—killed but now; yet as the animal heat hath not left the body, the kitchener undertakes it shall eat as tender as a young chicken—and this youth hath a special gift in shooting deer and never misses the heart or the brain, so that the blood is not driven through the flesh, as happens too often with us. It is a hart of grease—your Holiness has seldom seen such a haunch.'

The kitchener knew something of his business. Who (see the remarks of the British Solomon in 'The Fortunes of Nigel') says 'hart of grease says much;' for the fault of the Scottish red deer is deficiency in fat. So much so, that it is often supplemented from the humbler mutton. The kitchener was right in dwelling on the merits of a hart clean-killed; but we greatly doubt whether that haunch from Glendearg could have 'eaten tender as a chicken.' It had been carried down the glen from the enchanted spring, and had time enough to cool and to stiffen. But Scott,

with all his gifts, was no gourmet, and when Scrope or Glengarry sent him a haunch, be it said with all reverence, it was a case of the proverb of the pearls. He talks lightly of passing a haunch over to Lockhart's tender mercies, which he 'hacked well enough, as there was plenty to come and go upon;' and Lockhart tells us that when one of them came in, kept to corruption, Scott would sit in innocent surprise when his guests were sniffing the tainted air with unmistakable signs of disgust, as the deer in his native wilds when he gets wind of the stalker. Nevertheless, Scott's novels and poems, laying the scenes in the feudal times, and reviving Froissart-like the mediæval manners, are full of the glorification of the deer, living and dead. To say nothing of 'The Chase' in 'The Lady of the Lake,' he borrows many a simile from the hunting and the tinchel. But neither baron nor chieftain, beater nor driver, was over-fastidious as to the dressing and serving. The buck pulled down at the sports of Stirling, when Lufra broke away from the Douglas' side, was sent straight to the spit, that

> Venison and Bordeaux wine
> Might serve the archery to dine.

When venison furnished forth the better part of the feast of Clan Quhele at the solemn inauguration

of the succession of the young chieftain, more attention was paid to the dressing of the skins that protected the armour of the chosen champions than to the dressing of the deer. We always think with envy of the jovial midnight supper, when the clerk of Copmanshurst entertained the royal knight-errant, and the clutches of both were emulously in the bowels of the mighty pasty. But both the *convives* were men of Gargantuan appetite and ostrich-like digestion, and we suspect 'that sundry' members would have backed their bills, had that pasty been sent up as 'the joint' at a club in Pall Mall. But the Baron of Bradwardine, who had served in France and dined at the table of the Duke of Berwick, was more of a connoisseur than the holy clerk. He laid down the law sensibly and with knowledge, as to the comparative qualities and the seasons of roe and red deer. 'The roe may be hunted at all times alike; for never being in what is called pride of grease, he is also never out of season, though it be a truth that his venison is not equal to that of either the red or the fallow deer' (?) To which sentence, so far as the fallow deer is concerned, I venture to append a note of interrogation.

Going back to Bolton Abbey, it reminds me of another great poet who celebrated, incidentally, a

mediæval miracle. Wordsworth assures us that his 'White Doe' made her way, sabbath after sabbath, from Rylstone Fell to the church of the Priory. As she had a dozen miles to travel, going and returning, it may be presumed that the fair creature steered a bee-line course, through swamp, morass and treacherous quaking bog. Till she was placed under the safeguard of superstition, we cannot conceive, remembering the regularity of her church attendance, how she escaped the bows or hackbuts of the West Riding poachers, who always held their own in these dales, in spite of the watchers of Cliffords or Nortons. Wordsworth celebrates that deer poetically and platonically; but, by the way, we were agreeably surprised to find in his friend Southey a sensibility of which we had not suspected him. We knew him for a poet, a historian and a scholar, but we believed he cared as little for anything beyond his books as the worthy minister of Saint Ronan. Respect was changed to regard when we came on this imprecation, in a letter to his friend Bedford, who had urged the Laureate to alter some stanzas in a mortuary ode. 'If I do,' wrote Southey, with pious emphasis, 'may I boil my next haunch of venison.' It is sidelights in biography such as these which endear a poet to posterity; there we have the touch of the noble

nature which makes the whole world of refinement akin.

That Shakespeare loved venison we know. Not because he stole the deer from the Lucys' park at Fulford—for the theft did not come off at Charlecote. That might have been done in a spirit of pure devilry when he had fallen into dissipated company, as Denzil and Risingham 'snatched the deer from Rokeby Park,' or as Tompkins and Jocelyn came to the deadly quarrel over their trespass in Woodstock. But we see it in Shakespeare's plays *passim*. There is the memorable scene when Sir John is befooled by the merry wives in Windsor Forest. When he comes on disguised in hide and antlers, he says, 'For me, I am here a Windsor stag; and the fattest, I think, i' the forest.' Falstaff was a *bon vivant* if ever there was one, and his thoughts flew at once to the fat—to the inches of grease on the brisket. He may have been groaning over his own obesity, though well used to it; but he naturally thought of the savoury venison as it would be served by mine host of the Garter or by Mistress Quickly's cook in Eastcheap.

We could multiply at will more modern instances. Love Peacock's 'Maid Marian,' with the forest queen and those sylvan banquets at which the victims of the free outlaws were hospitably entertained in a semi-

metrical glorification of vert and venison, interspersed with snatches of ballads which were the songs of the bowmen of the Greenwood. Peacock was a dreamer and fantastical novelist: but he had sound ideas on the subject of cookery, and has conceived in his 'Dr. Opimian' the type of the orthodox and high-living divine of the Establishment, who held, with Johnson, that the man who did not mind his belly was worse than an infidel. No one of his admirers is likely to forget his sage remarks on Palestine soup and the jowl of the salmon. Peacock was a poetical dreamer, and George Borrow, on the other hand, was an eminently practical man and a devoted missionary. The author of 'The Bible in Spain,' not only took his life in his hand habitually, but condemned himself to asceticism. Travelling in Spain through the civil strife between Carlists and Christinos, he would generally have been intensely grateful for the cow-heels that Sancho marked for his own. We admire Borrow's single-minded devotion all the more, that the natural man delighted in good and substantial cheer. The round of beef that Lavengro dined on at the Western coaching inn will live with the leg of mutton and mealy potatoes of the Wiltshire farm painted by Richard Jefferies with the realistic picturesqueness of Rembrandt's joint in the Louvre. When

Lavengro praises the hedgehog encased in clay and baked in embers by the gipsies, we readily take his word that the *plat* was delicious. We can see him now smacking his lips over the *salmis* of thyme-fed rabbits, over which he gloats with gusto, when a table was spread unexpectedly for him in famine-stricken Portugal. But in the matter of venison his feelings hurry him away, and he soars from his nervous prose into sublime poetry. It is in the interview with the sporting county justice, on the day of the prize-fight, when his respectable Norfolk acquaintance, Thurtell, subsequently hanged for the Elstree murder, is backing the bruiser with the flattened nose. The worthy magistrate is giving the aspirations of his friend, the scholarly Whiter :—

> Oh, give me the haunch of a buck to cut, and to drink
> Madeira old
> And a gentle wife to rest with and in my arms to fold,
> An Arabic book to study ; a Norfolk cob to ride, &c.

And we ask if there can be a more enchanting picture of the life of a refined and virtuous man who proves his gratitude for heaven's best gifts by enjoying them heartily ?

Venison was of course the staple dish at the great mediæval banquets arranged on a scale of lavish profusion. Fortunately no meat keeps so well or so

long with ordinary care, for the deer must have been sent in from many a distant forest and chase to furnish out those sumptuous boards. The great house of Neville had manors in most of the English counties. At the installation of George, the youngest brother of the Kingmaker, as Archbishop of York, all the world of the Court society was bidden to the feasting. Upwards of 500 'stagges, bucks, and roes' were served entire, and 4,000 cold pasties of venison figured on the bill of fare. At many a coronation banquet the *menu* was nearly as magnificent, as we gather from 'The Noble Book of Cookery,' reprinted from a rare manuscript in the Holkham collection, and edited by Mrs. Napier.' The guests brought Gargantuan appetites to those feasts, and the caterers went in for show and quantity rather than quality. We can imagine the amount of pains which could be spared on the dressing and the serving when half a thousand deer were turning simultaneously on the spits. Exceptional attention may have been paid to the bucks that were destined for the upper tables. They appeared in what we should now consider barbaric company. There were peacocks displaying their gorgeous trains—the oldest and toughest of the cocks; there were swans in their snowy plumage, selected for size and splendour; there were even the eagles we

should now condemn as carrion, and which in all human probability may have been centenarians; and the head and chine of the savage boar—which took precedence of the deer—may have belonged to a brute who had been the terror of generations and ravaged the woodlands in defiance of the rangers. In those days, and with such impracticable materials, the chief carver and his *aides-de-cour* had no sinecures. The rather that the fork had not been invented. They grappled the beast or bird with one hand, breaking it up with the other—by the way, 'breaking' was the technical expression for carving the deer. Indeed the technicalities of carving were systematised as a philological fine art, with phrases assigned to each separate species, from the breaking of the deer to the 'unlacing' of the coney.

Those ancestors of ours must have been men of heroic mould and iron stomachs. They breakfasted, with their ladies, on salt beef and beer, they spiced their wines into infernal decoctions, and when the cuisine went beyond plain roasting and boiling, the good meat was bedevilled by incompetent cooks. Some of the recipes in 'The Noble Boke of Cookery' are curious, but we can recommend few conscientiously for modern imitation. That for the 'rosting' of venison—when the deer was not served entire—

directs you to cut the meat into slices, spit them and powder with salt and ginger. The 'side of high grease' is to be mangled in similar fashion; but as if the scorched slices had not suffered sufficiently, they are to be subsequently boiled in red wine. Nothing could well have been more ingeniously devised to get rid of the fat and let those juices evaporate which it is the aspiration of modern cookery to retain. The recipe might pass well enough for making kabobs in an Eastern desert; but the Orientals have the excuse of a scarcity of fuel. For a 'mortice of flesche,' you are to pound up the venison with flesh of hens, and seethe it and thicken with bread crumbs and colour with saffron and boil again, and thicken again with yoke of eggs—and then send up the suspicious mess. But to do those ingenious mediæval artists bare justice, they let no part of the animal be wasted. The liver and kidneys, we admit, are excellent, and black puddings of the venison are not to be despised. But the Umbles or Numbles, which were much in favour, simply meant the entrails in general.

'To make numbles tak hert middrif and kidney and hew them smalle and prise out the blood and sethe them in water and ale and colour it with brown bred or with blod and fors it with canell and galin-

galle and when it boilithe kole it a litille with ale and serve it.'

In the dish made of those modest materials, we have the obvious origin of our humble pie. And in those times of enforced economy and rough living, the deer like the bullock went into the salting trough, and was toughened for winter consumption in a strong solution of brine.

There has been a long-standing controversy as to the comparative merits of haunches of hill mutton and haunches of venison. Christopher North, who professed himself a connoisseur in good living, pronounces dogmatically, *more suo* :—'Try a *gigot* of five-year-old blackfaced,' he says, 'with the venison, by alternate platefuls, and you will invariably leave off after the venison.' But our faith in Christopher was considerably shaken by some previous remarks on a Tay salmon. Conceive a man of taste and feeling committing sacrilege on the crimping and the curd by calling on the waiter to bring the casters, and blending vinegar, ketchup, and cayenne, with what?—with peas and potatoes. For the only sauce for that noble fish was the water in which he had been boiled. We attach greater importance to the discussion of the epicures in 'Meg Dods,' although there the dispute was left practically open. Jekyl

declares that the fat buck from a southern park is fitting food for heroes and princes. Meg sniffs indignantly at his southland fancies, and holds for the deer of her native hills. Whereas the Indian nabob, 'stiff in opinions,' like Buckingham, pronounces: 'For my own private eating a leg of five-year-old heath wether mutton before all the venison in the world.' In sober truth, it is a case of the two sides of the shield. All depends on the sex, age, condition, feeding and breeding of the deer. Hence the importance of buying your venison from a salesman who has a reputation at stake and whose word may be implicitly trusted. The ideal red deer for table purposes is a young yeld or barren hind, in prime condition from favourable pasturage. Not a few of the forests are overstocked: in some the grazing and the shelter of the ruminating ground are exceptionally good, while others, like the South Downs, or the glens of western Scotland, have herbs and grasses which give an unapproachable flavour to the flesh. So, naturally, there is a still wider difference between the fallow deer in enclosed parks. It stands to reason that an animal fattened simply on rich meadow grass, though he may run heavy and lay on a superabundance of fat, must be inferior to his cousins of the uplands, bred on the slopes of the

Cheviots, or on the Welsh marches, where the heather is shooting up among the bracken and the air in the warm spring season is fragrant with the balmy thyme. The best fallow venison we ever tasted came of deer escaped from a fenceless park, who had been ranging free for several generations through woodlands and sheep pastures skirted by cornfields.

As for the roe, he deserves far more respect than is paid to him. We have heard what the Baron of Bradwardine had to say on the subject, and it is true that he is never altogether out of season; but both buck and doe are at their best in the height of summer, before the rut. For some reason, that is specially noticeable in the well-conditioned denizens of the German woods. In a Scottish shooting box the roe always comes in conveniently for soup or pasty, stew or 'fry;' but he is more appreciated in Germany, and *pour cause.* His is the only venison generally procurable. He swarms in the woods and is always super-excellent, for he feeds in the meadows by meandering brooks, and takes free toll of the crops with impunity. We know nothing much better than a tender *rehrücke* or saddle, served with an artistic *sauce piquante.* By the way, that is one of the best dishes in the *menus* of the Cologne hotels, although too often it is injured by inadequate hanging.

Only last year we luxuriated in an exquisite *rehrücke* at one of the best managed of these caravanserais. The meat had been hung *à point*, and the cooking approached perfection, so much so that we were effusive in commendation. The head waiter remarked complacently that the foresters brought the roe fresh every day, as if they were trout from the Eifel, or salmon from the Rhine, and should pass at a bound from the glade to the platter. So no one, of course, can have tasted venison to advantage in hot climates, for there you must choose between toughness and putrefaction. But such abuses in the cooler latitudes of North Germany, and in a kitchen presided over by a *chef* of pretensions, are unpardonable sins of negligence or ignorance. We may add that the tourist on the Rhine may do worse than wash down the *rehrücke* with Liebfraumilch or Rauenthaler.

Serving the venison is a matter of no little consequence, for the fat has the unfortunate defect of congealing with extraordinary celerity. As a rule, eating off gold or silver plate is one of the penalties of ostentatious magnificence, with which the gourmand would willingly dispense. There must always be an unpleasant *arrière-pensée* of plate-powder lurking in the chasings and stray corners. But with venison, in

a small and select company, silver, or the humbler pewter, with spirit lamps beneath, may be used with great advantage. Always sensitive to the fleeting nature of earthly pleasures, the bitter lesson is never more forcibly brought home to the epicure than when the venison fat and gravy are congealing visibly on china before his eyes. The evanescent joy eludes him unless he bolt the delicacies American fashion, which is fatal to his hopes, obnoxious to his principles, and attended by indigestion, dyspepsia and remorse.

Carving is to the full as important as serving, though now it is generally done at the side table, and beyond the control of a capable Amphitryon. More is the pity, for much depends upon it, so far as venison is concerned in especial. Meg Dods gives excellent directions and suggests mapping out a chart with cloves for the guidance of the inexperienced. Incisions should be made longitudinally and crossways, the slices should be somewhat thin and cut lengthways, the more delicate lying to the left, when the joint is turned endways to the carver. But carving the haunch was always an embarrassing piece of business, and likely to breed envy and malice. The carver, in an excess of the charity which begins at home, was suspected of looking after himself, of making

invidious reservations and smuggling away choice morsels. He was supposed to act on Mr. Lowton's maxim in 'Pickwick:'—'Friendship is all very well, but d——n hurting yourself for anybody else.' Moreover when he was careless or incompetent, the guests first served were sure to come best off. Perhaps, when the party is small, and the plates are set on spirit lamps, the fairest course would be that adopted by Mr. Moulder in 'Orley Farm,' when distributing his Christmas turkey. Mr. Moulder divided breast, liver, stuffing, &c., into as many portions as there were guests, and then dealt them out with judicial impartiality. So would only unimpeachable justice be done, and those heartburnings which play the mischief with the palate would be avoided.

Before railways had run the coaches off the road, the Scotch forests were far removed from southern dinner tables. But, by a beneficent arrangement of Providence, venison may be kept with due care for a fortnight or even three weeks. When it has been hung in the larder the precautions are simple, though close attention is needful. Cut out the pipe running along the backbone, which is likely to taint, and wipe away the mould which gathers on the surface and in the folds of the meat. You may dust from time to time with flour or pepper or pounded ginger.

When the haunch is to be dressed, sponge the surface with lukewarm water, and rub it with butter and lard. Cover with sheets of paper, well buttered or steeped in salad oil, and over that lay a paste of flour and water half an inch thick. Swathe with strong paper again, secure with greased string, and drench the whole in melted butter to prevent the paper from catching fire. Baste incessantly before a strong, clear fire, using a cradle spit; the time depending of course on the size of the haunch. A large joint may need at least five hours. Half an hour before it ought to be done, remove the swathings and test with a skewer. Then reduce the fire, and baste every few minutes with claret and butter. Celerity in sending from the fire to the table is everything, and the brown gravy poured over the meat should be as hot as the dish on which it is served. The recipes for the gravy are various, although all suggest similar ingredients. A very good one is a pound of currant jelly, a gill of port, and the rind of a lemon with a flavouring of cinnamon. Other experts substitute claret for port – which we think a mistake—and suggest the addition of cloves and nutmegs, cinnamon and cayenne. These details must be matters of taste or fancy. Mistress Meg Dods, as usual, is somewhat more original. She tells us that the sauces most relished by the Cleikum Club were, first,

a glass of claret with three times the quantity of venison or mutton gravy, and a small glassful of raspberry vinegar; or, second, a plain piquant sauce of white wine vinegar and white sugar, heated in a stone jar.

Meg Dods has an alternative recipe, taken from the notebooks of old Mr. Winterblossom, who declared it had been handed down from the kitchens of Mary of Guise. There is internal evidence of that, for it smacks of the dark ages. We should be sorry to recommend it, for it seems an excellent way of destroying the essential savour. Nevertheless it may be given briefly as a curiosity. Season the haunch by rubbing it with mixed spices. Soak and baste for six hours with claret and vinegar. Strain the liquor, mix with butter, and baste the haunch all the time it is roasting. The sauce is the contents of the dripping pan, with ketchup added, or highly flavoured vinegar.

A roasted neck may rival the haunch, or it may be cut up and served as cutlets. Trim the cutlets; season them with pepper. Dip each separately in melted butter, dust with flour, sprinkle with beaten egg and roll in bread crumbs. Fry in hot lard for ten minutes; then lay the cutlets in a dish covered with paper. Let them simmer before the fire for a

few minutes to evaporate the grease, and serve with *financière* sauce.

For haricot cut the cutlets somewhat thick, or slice squares of a couple of inches or so from the shoulder. Brown with butter in a stewpan over a bright fire, then drain off the grease and sprinkle flour. Flood the meat in stock, season with salt and pepper, and stir till it boils. Scoop the pink of a few delicate carrots, and boil for half an hour. Boil some small balls of turnip for half the time. Strain the vegetables, and add port or claret with red currant jelly.

Venison collops are a Scottish version of the English cutlets, and it is an excellent dish when you bring a Highland appetite to it. But perhaps the same objection generally applies as to Mary of Guise's haunch—that it is inartistically over-seasoned. The directions are, to season the cutlets highly with mixed spices, having previously marinaded them in claret, vinegar, and spice. After being browned in the stewpan, a sauce is then poured over them, which has been slowly heated in a close-covered pan. Its ingredients are a quarter-pint of strong brown gravy, as much claret or port, grated sugar, bread crumbs, and a glass of white wine vinegar. Capital these collops may be, as we have often proved. But so

have we seen an old goat marinaded, when meant to do duty for chamois in the hostelries of the Alps.

The collops, like a civet, come in usefully when the deer has been long hung and perhaps overhung. The civet of fresh venison is sure to be tough and indigestible. Because, for the civet, steaks are to be cut from shoulder or breast, although sometimes it is made of chops which come from the back ribs. As the meat is likely to be lean, fry some bacon in butter, and when melted drain off most of the liquid. Brown the steaks in the liquor, mixing with wine and soup stock. Add vegetables and savoury herbs at discretion —onions and mushrooms are specially recommended.

Roedeer, by the way, makes an excellent civet; it used to be a *spécialité* at the sylvan Restaurant Henri Quatre at St. Germains-en-laye.

Historically and gastronomically the pasty ranks next to the haunch. It is economical, too, for anything may be used for it, although the breast is generally preferred. Cut the pieces small, trimming away bone and skin. Bones and unconsidered trimmings make excellent gravy. Distribute impartially the fat and the lean; if the fat fall short, as is probable, supplement with good mutton, season with pepper, &c., pour in the gravy, with the indispensable additions of red wine and white vinegar; do not forget to

add mushrooms, if procurable, and failing these, shred in a few onions. A squeeze of a lemon gives zest to the dish, and, as Bailie Jarvie's father, the Deacon, said of a boiled tup's head, an overdone pasty is rank poison. An hour and a half of baking in the oven should suffice for a moderate-sized dish. In any case, underdoing is a fault on the right side which can easily be rectified. N.B.—In the opinion of most competent judges a pasty slightly underdone is decidedly better cold than hot.

The shoulder is often too lean to roast, and is generally somewhat dry. It is sold reasonably enough in the market to be well within the reach of modest purses. But with simple treatment and small expenditure in spices—which in this case may be judiciously used in moderation—it makes an admirable stew, and, as Mr. Micawber remarked of the devil of underdone mutton, there are few better comestibles in its way. Keep the shoulder till it bones easily. Flatten and cover with slices of fat mutton. Sprinkle with spices and roll it up. Stew in a close pan in beef or mutton gravy, and when nearly ready for dishing, add some wine, or, if strict economy be a consideration, we suggest that ale may serve.

In our opinion there is not much to be said for soup of venison, pure and simple. It is made like

similar soups, and has not the rich flavour of the Scottish *purée de lièvre*, with its copious infusion of the fresh blood. But venison plays a leading part in the *potage à la* Meg Merrilies, for which we are indebted, as Lockhart tells us, to the genius of the Duke of Buccleuch's accomplished *chef*, M. Florence, an ex-officer of the Grand Army, who devised it as a graceful compliment to the author of 'Guy Mannering.' You may use with the venison the shin of beef or the scrag of mutton. Boil with carrot and turnip, parsley, and peppercorns. Throw in anything you please in the way of winged game, from muirfowl or snipe to partridge or pheasant. Carve the birds in delicate pieces and season with spices. Put the game to the strained stock, with small onions, sliced celery and sections of white cabbage, and let the vegetables simmer for half an hour before the game is added. Wine to taste, as previously, though that was no part of the savoury mess which gladdened the soul of Dominie Sampson in the Kaim of Dern-cleugh.

We had almost forgotten the familiar hash, the secret of which and three-fourths of the savour are in the concoction of the gravy as already described. The meat and the gravy in the saucepan must be shaken frequently, and suffered to simmer slowly.

Here, too, mutton fat should be added to supplement deficiencies, and there can be no question that French beans are the vegetable to eat with the hash, though it might puzzle the *physiologiste de goût* to assign any such satisfactory reason as invariably associates beans with bacon. Finally, as everything may be turned to profit in this inestimable animal, the liver makes an excellent fry for breakfast; and a roasted heart is not to be despised, when nothing better may be had. Soak the heart for several hours; wash away the blood, and dry it well. Stuff with veal stuffing, sew it up, rub with butter, cover with flour and water, and wrap in paper tied in with string. Roast and baste for a couple of hours before a clear fire. Remove paper and paste fifteen minutes before it is done; dredge with flour, and baste again with melted butter. Serve with sauce and currant jelly, and see that it is sent to table hot as the nobler haunch.

We have said our say elsewhere against the practice of mixing wines at dinner, and serving various vintages, however rich and rare, with the several courses. We said it was a sound rule to stick to champagne, nor have we anything to retract. But no rule is without its exceptions, and we are bound to admit an exception in the case of venison.

For with venison Burgundy goes as naturally as iced punch with the turtle, and with far more obvious reason. The bouquet of the one and the savour of the other were evidently predestined to make a happy love match.

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